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THE METRES OF ENGLISH POETRY

The Metres of English Poetry

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ENID HAMER M.A.

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TO

DOUGLAS HAMER

PREFACE

PROSODY in England has been a backward study, for true poetry has little need of it. There is no other art in which genius may be so far unaware of the laws and materials by which and in which it works. A painter must know something of a colourman's chemistry ; a sculptor cannot neglect the properties of stone and metal ; a musician must school himself in the complex mathematics of harmony. But the poet's materials are more intimately a part of common life, the sounds of spoken words, and the laws for their manipulation are instinctive. A fine ear is his guide. Most of our greatest poets have apparently spared very little time for studying the science of their art, and even those who have been most careful and unerring metrists have either been completely silent on the subject, or have left only fragmentary and unsatisfactory references to the theory of metre, and have made statements which are often belied by their own poetry.

It is clear then that the function of prosody is not to serve the poet. As a guide to composition it is unnecessary to him and useless to others. Therefore, it is often said, prosody is a dead study ; let us ignore it. Most of us, however, approach poetry, not as makers, but as readers. And it is with the reader that the function of prosody lies, as an aid to criticism, and to the keener enjoyment of exact appreciation. No work of art can be truly enjoyed till we experience in regard to it that sense of possession which comes of knowing *why* we enjoy, and how the artist has achieved certain effects upon the mind and senses. The so-called *appreciation* which shrinks from technique, and

repudiates the function of the brain in artistic experience, is a vain and idle illusion.

It has been the aim of these chapters to investigate the rhythms of English poetry, first as a matter of pure mechanics, but secondly and principally as the strings of a delicate instrument for the creation of poetic effects, and to explore and illustrate as many as possible of these effects. The view which I have taken of the system on which English poetry is composed is not new, but it seems to me fundamentally sound and adequate, and I have profited by what I felt to be inconsistent or incomplete in the work of others in endeavouring to set it forth in a comprehensive and coherent form. While I have tried to give a sufficiently complete survey of English poetry from the metrical standpoint, it would have been tedious to elaborate those simpler parts of the subject which are well known or easily understood. Other aspects, either by their intrinsic importance or their comparative unfamiliarity, have called for fuller treatment.

I have also been at special pains, in dealing with poetry earlier than the nineteenth century, to study and quote from early printed texts. In some cases a modern reprint which represents the original version has been used, and for Shakespeare I have collated a modern edition with the folio reading. In many cases modernisation of the text makes a considerable difference to the metre; and if it is not always possible, as we should wish, to read exactly what the poet wrote, since printers, as well as being sometimes careless, have always been conventional in imposing the spellings which they established, it is at least very instructive to learn what was accepted by a poet's own contemporaries as being his work, and to note in different periods the conventions of spelling and punctuation which affect prosody.

The work was begun during my tenure of the William Noble Fellowship in the University of Liverpool (1924–5), but the main part of it was written during the following years of lecturing there to students, and with their needs

constantly in view. To Professor Oliver Elton, when King Alfred Professor of English Literature in the University, I owe the suggestion that such a handbook was needed, and my thanks are due to him for much helpful criticism and advice throughout its composition, and also to his successor, Professor L. C. Martin. I am also greatly indebted to Professor Lascelles Abercrombie for much encouragement when the book was in its early stages, and to my husband for constant and detailed criticism, for a bibliographer's advice on texts and editions, and for his valuable services in making the index.

I acknowledge, with thanks, the courtesy of the following holders of copyright in permitting me to reprint complete poems, the first four in return for verbal acknowledgment only: Messrs. Macmillan & Co., Ltd., for *The World*, by Christina Rossetti, and " Beside the idle summer sea," by W. E. Henley; Messrs. William Heinemann, Ltd., for *John Webster, A Ballad of Dreamland*, and the *Dedication* to *A Century of Roundels*, by A. C. Swinburne; Messrs. Sidgwick & Jackson, Ltd., for *Love*, by Rupert Brooke; Messrs. Methuen & Co., Ltd., for *Theocritus*, by Oscar Wilde; the Oxford University Press, for *Triolet*, by Robert Bridges; the Oxford University Press and Mr. Alban Dobson for *Clean Hands*, and *To George H. Boughton*, by Austin Dobson; Mr. W. M. Meredith, by courtesy of Messrs. Constable & Co., Ltd., London, and Messrs. Charles Scribner's Sons, New York, for *Lucifer in Starlight*, and Section XLI of *Modern Love*, by George Meredith.

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January, 1930

CONTENTS

CHAP.		PAGE
I	The Principles of English Metre	1
II	The Four-Foot Couplet	24
III	The Five-Foot Couplet	45
IV	Blank Verse from the Beginnings to the Restoration	61
V	Non-Dramatic Blank Verse: Milton to Cowper.	85
VI	Dramatic Blank Verse from the Re-opening of the Theatres to the End of the Eighteenth Century	114
VII	Blank Verse in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries	128
VIII	Iambic Stanza Forms	149
IX	The Sonnet	186
X	The English Ode	218
XI	Trochaic Verse	229
XII	Trisyllabic Metres	259
XIII	Paeonic Verse	279
XIV	French Forms in English Verse	286
XV	Classical Metres in English	294
	List of Texts and Editions	327
	Index	335

THE METRES OF ENGLISH POETRY

CHAPTER I

THE PRINCIPLES OF ENGLISH METRE

ALL literature is divided according to spirit into *Prose* and *Poetry*, according to technique into *Prose* and *Verse*. Nearly all poetry is in verse. When quite young children are asked to point out the difference between prose and verse, it is usual, in these days of too many books, and too little spoken literature, for them to think first of the difference in the appearance of the printed pages. Poetry is printed in lines, so arranged as to make a rough sort of pattern on the paper, while prose has no such pattern. The distinction is not altogether an unreal one, as the names themselves tell us. Prose, from the Latin *prosa* or *prorsa oratio*, means straightforward, direct, continuous speech. Verse, from the Latin *versus*, a turning, means speech which returns upon itself, repeating its arrangement so as to form a pattern.

But the youngest critic can soon find out that the pattern which we see in written verse is only an attempt to represent to the eye the true pattern, which we *hear*, and which very quickly attracts attention when we read aloud verse which is printed as prose. Verse leads us to expect some kind of recurrence, and fulfils the expectation.

But what is it that we expect to recur? Not particular words, except in a special type of verse, that which has

refrain. Not particular sounds, except in the case of rhyme, which is by no means universal in poetry. There remains, then, only some expectation connected with the enunciation of words or sounds, the way in which they are spoken.

The units or sections into which we divide up the words which we speak are syllables. Every separate vowel sound in a word, except where two are very closely united into a diphthong, forms a syllable, the consonant sounds attaching themselves to the preceding or following vowels. There are three ways in which a syllable may differ from its neighbours in enunciation :

In *quantity* it may be longer or shorter.
In *emphasis* it may be stronger or weaker.
In *pitch* it may be higher or lower.

These qualities are present in infinitely varying degrees, though not all equally noticeable or important, in all the Romance and Teutonic languages. By their nature they can only be perceived when a number of syllables is heard consecutively. A sound can only be called high or long or strong when there are others with which to compare it. But when words are spoken in groups, as in speech or song, the ear is conscious of movements or fluctuations in one or more of the qualities of their syllables, and when any kind of pattern or design is perceptible in the movement, the language becomes rhythmic. The rhythm or movement of language, forming curves and undulations of sound, has an effect on the mind which may be quite distinct from the pure sensation of the individual sounds, and from the rational meaning of the words to our understanding. When it cooperates with, supplements, and enriches the rational significance, it becomes itself significant, and that is one of the processes by which language becomes literature. Rhythm, in the sense of syllabic pattern or repetition, belongs to poetry alone, but the language of prose may have artistic, significant, and expressive movement, and such prose is often called rhythmic.

In English the most important and easily perceptible movement occurs in a quality which may best be called

stress, and it is on this quality that the rhythm of verse is founded. There is some difference of opinion as to the exact nature of stress. Some hold that it consists of emphasis alone, and that pitch and quantity vary in no fixed relation to emphasis. Others hold that, while emphasis is certainly the most important and easily recognisable element in rhythmic variation, variations in emphasis are accompanied by corresponding variations in pitch or quantity, or both, and that a strong degree of emphasis always carries with it a high degree of pitch, or necessarily lengthens the syllable on which it falls. But it is quite easy to recognise stress when we hear it. The word *Monday*, for example, has a stressed syllable followed by a more lightly stressed one which by comparison may be called unstressed, and *today* an unstressed followed by a stressed, while *tomorrow* has a stressed syllable between two unstressed. In continuous speech of any kind, whether verse or prose, there are of course innumerable degrees of stress, but it is still generally possible to call any one syllable definitely *stressed* or *unstressed*, or, perhaps more conveniently, *heavy* or *light*. The following marks are used to indicate stress:

For heavy syllables /
For light syllables ×
For intermediate syllables, where necessary, \.

Let us apply this apparatus to the examination of a piece of highly-wrought prose, and to a piece of simple verse, beginning a new line after every pause:

/ × × / /
Life is a pure flame,
× × / × × × / × × / × × / ×
and we live by an invisible Sun within us.
× / / × / × × / ×
A small fire sufficeth for life,
/ / \ / / × / × /
great flames seemed too little after death,
× / / × × / × / × /
while men vainly affected precious pyres,
× × / × / × / × ×
and to burn like Sardanapalus.[1]

[1] Sir Thomas Browne, *Urne-Buriall*, Chapter V. *Works*, Vol. IV, p. 49.

× / × / × / × /
When *Spring*, with dewy Fingers cold,
× / × / × / × /
Returns to deck their hallow'd Mold,
× / × / × / × /
She there shall dress a sweeter Sod,
× / × / × / × /
Than *Fancy*'s Feet have ever trod.[1]

In the prose extract we see that the number of syllables in the groups varies considerably, and the heavy syllables are irregularly placed: in the verse passage the lines consist of the same number of syllables, and, among these, heavy and light are so arranged that they can be divided into small groups, identical in rhythm:

× / × / × / × /
When Spring | with dew|y Fing|ers cold [2]

In this case the groups consist of a light syllable followed by a heavy one, and are arranged in fours. Verse rhythm, as distinct from prose movement, would seem then to consist of a number of repeated stress units, arranged in groups which also repeat themselves. But the matter is not so simple as the sharp distinction between the above two passages would seem to indicate. The regular rhythm of the verse passage is such as it is very difficult to find in good poetry. As soon as we open a volume of poems we find ourselves confronted with verse in which the lines are not built up of groups of exactly similar units, and where the breaks between the lines do not always represent a break in the continuity of the rhythm.

× / × / / / × /
Alone, alone, all, all alone,
× / × × / / /
Alone on a wide wide sea!
× / × × / / × ×
And never a saint took pity on→ [2]
× / × / × ×
My soul in agony.[3]

---

[1] Collins, *Ode*, 1746. *Poems*, p. 258.
[2] I use this sign at the end of a line to indicate that there is no pause in reading.
[3] Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Part IV, *Poetical Works*, p. 101.

At first sight there seems to be in verse like this no more pattern than in prose. But the ear recognises it as verse, and as extremely beautiful and expressive verse. And even the eye can perceive that our pattern unit × / appears more often than any other combination of syllables. It can be separated three times in the first line:

× / × / / / × /
Alone, | alone, | all, all | alone.

And if we do the same for the whole stanza, separating the pattern unit where it occurs, we shall find that the remaining syllables fall easily into groups, which bear some close relationship to the pattern unit. Either they have two syllables, both light or both heavy, or they have one heavy syllable like the pattern unit, but it is preceded by two light syllables instead of one:

/ /
Alone, | alone, | all, all | alone,
× × / / /
Alone | on a wide, | wide sea
× × / \ / × ×
And nev|er a saint | took pit|y on
× ×
My soul | in ag|ony.

The units not marked are all the same, ×/. It will be noticed also that the lines fall into pattern, two sets of four units, and two of three, arranged alternately. If we try to divide the prose passage on page 3, in the same way, we shall find that although we separate the group ×/ whenever it occurs the remaining syllables do not separate into sections which have any relationship to that group, nor does any other approximately regular grouping suggest itself.

But in order to understand verse rhythm completely we must go to its origin in the mind of the poet. A poet in composing has at the back of his mind, sometimes quite consciously, sometimes unconsciously, an abstract and quite regular rhythmic pattern, which we call the *base* of the poem, and which consists of a series of weak and strong beats or pulsations, independent of words altogether.

Upon this he shapes and measures his language. He seldom reproduces the base exactly in words, but what he must do is so to order the movement of his phrases as to communicate the base to the hearer's mind also, and to give him the pattern against which to measure the actual rhythm which he hears. Any departures will be acceptable which do not blot out the impression of the base, and as we shall see, departures from the base become one of the chief means of expression at the poet's disposal.

The repeating units of the base are called *feet*, and the groups of syllables which represent them are called *feet* also. All departures from the rhythm of the base are called *modulations*. The nature and extent of modulation, the kinds of feet, and the frequency with which they may be used, must be decided by the poet's own sense of rhythmic fitness, and we accept or reject the result according as it enables us to keep the base in mind and hear it through the modulations. Simple and familiar bases naturally admit of more modulations than complicated or unusual ones, but even in the most freely modulated verse there is generally a balance on the side of conformity among the individual feet, especially at the ends of lines or sections, when a distinct and final impression is to be left in the mind.

The feet of the base are grouped in lines, which may in turn be grouped in larger repeating sections called stanzas. A line of the base ends where a pause is to be expected, so that, in accordance with the usual length of a spoken phrase, or breath-group of words, lines of four or five feet are the commonest in English, though longer and shorter lines are frequently used. A stanza ideally corresponds with a logical or emotional division of the matter of the poem, to a stage in the thought or narrative, or to a distinct moment of passion or grouping of imagery. Besides stanza arrangement, there is the arrangement of lines in pairs or couplets, generally of the same length and composition, and the form in which the single line is the largest formal unit, as it is in blank verse.

The moulding of language in this way constitutes metre,

the rhythm of verse. Metre is associated with poetry for a fundamental reason. Regular rhythmic movement of any kind is the natural accompaniment of strong emotion, as when grief, agitation, or pleasure are expressed by rhythmic movements of the body or limbs ; and rhythm can also stimulate emotion, as when martial passions are aroused by drum beats. The matter of poetry is always an idea, experience, or story, clothed in emotion, and its emotional nature is mainly conveyed to us by the metre, as its rational aspect is conveyed by the words, though the pure sounds of the words individually have a share in the emotional appeal.

It is therefore easy to realise that modulation is not simply a permitted licence or irregularity, for the convenience of composers, but that it does, or ought to, mean something, and that when it means something, it is actually much better than a rhythm which conforms exactly to the base. The base should spring out of and symbolise the mood or tone of feeling in which the material of the poem is conceived by the poet, and it should put our minds when we receive it into tune with his. We are thus enabled to enter into the same mood and to appreciate the significance of the modulations, which are dictated by the progressive variations of thought and emotion within that mood. Some of the very common bases, of course, give only the widest and most general indication of mood, and leave almost all of the emotional effect to be produced by modulation. This explains why a rhythm with modulations is better than one which adheres strictly to the base. A monotonous repetition of any rhythmic form could convey only a very limited emotional meaning. The movement of prose, when the matter conveyed has any emotional accompaniment, is often significant in something like the way in which metre is significant. But metre is the more delicate instrument of emotional expression, in that we can readily apprehend a feeling conveyed in slight variations on an expected pattern, whereas in prose the movement must be very striking and unusual to command special attention.

Metre gives us two kinds of satisfaction, that of repeated

rhythmic pattern, which we hear in our minds, and that of the expressive modulations, which we actually hear. A certain amount of experience of poetry is often necessary before we can enjoy both these rhythms at the same time. That is why children and untrained readers sometimes distort the real speech-rhythm to make it fit the base, and would read the last line of our *Ancient Mariner* stanza, for instance, as

× / × / × /
My soul | in ag|ony.

So far we have discussed only the most obvious form of modulation, the substitution for the expected base-foot of some other kind of foot. But there are other ways in which a rhythm made up of actual words and speech-phrases modulates on the base. The same kind of foot does not sound quite the same when it ends with the end of a word and is thus cut off as a thing apart, and when it ends in the middle of a word, and is thus linked up by the continuation of the word with the next foot. The nearest approach in actual words to an exact reproduction of the base rhythm is found in a line like:

× / × / × / × / × /
And swims | or sinks, | or wades, | or creeps, | or flyes:[1]

But such a line is extremely rare. Even in the lines quoted on page 4 as being perfectly regular, though we mark the stresses in the same way, we notice as we read some difference between the rhythmic effect of the feet in italics and the others:

When Spring | *with dew|y Fing*|ers cold,
Returns to deck | *their hall*|ow'd Mold,[2]

And often the crossing of rhythm between the words, or word-groups, and the feet is a very important part of the modulation:

[1] Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Bk. II, l. 950.
[2] Collins, *Ode*, 1746. *Poems*, p. 258.

O Night/ingale ! ||/ thou surel/y || art
A creat/ure || of/a ' fi/ery || heart '.[1]

We have already mentioned that in the base which the poet and we hear in our minds, there is a break in the rhythmic flow at the end of every line. But in the rhythm of actual verse, very often the sense requires a pause somewhere within the line, and may run on, or overflow, from one line to another :

Loud || as from numbers without number, || sweet→
As from blest voices, uttering joy.[2]

Pause and overflow have a very marked effect in determining the character of a particular poem, or the usage of a poet. But it is by too insistently emphasising this form of modulation that the character of verse is so often lost when it is read or recited. Some actors of Shakespeare, for instance, speak the verse with such insistence on the sense-grouping of the words that we lose hold of the base. This is much more likely to occur when the verse is blank than when there is rhyme to indicate the ends of the lines.

There are four base feet, generally recognised and now in common use. Each contains only one heavy syllable. The two which proceed from light to heavy and are called *rising* feet are

the iambus, ×/
the anapaest, ××/

The two which proceed from heavy to light and are called *falling* feet are

the trochee, /×
the dactyl, /××

Besides admitting one or more of the other three as modulations, each of these base feet is capable of being replaced by certain feet which are not themselves used as bases.

[1] Wordsworth, *Poems of the Imagination, IX, Poetical Works*, p. 186.
[2] Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Bk. III, ll. 346–7.

The trochaic and the iambic are the oldest bases, and the iambic is the commonest and most flexible. By tracing the modulations of the iambic foot we shall encounter most of the non-base feet.

The names used for the feet are taken from Greek. In the Classical languages quantity and not stress was the basis of metre and the names belong originally to the classical feet which have the same arrangement of long and short syllables as ours have of heavy and light. There are no convenient English words to replace them, but the tradition attached to the words has often caused confusion, and it must be borne in mind that an English iamb or dactyl is not the same thing as a Latin or Greek foot of that name. For instance, judged according to quantity the word ⏑ – *shadows* is an iambus, but in English it is a trochee.

1. A stressed *monosyllable* may take the place of an iambic foot:

Blow, winds, | and crack | your cheeks! | rage! | blow![1]

It is found most frequently as the initial foot:

Soft|ly she | was go|ing up,
And a star | or two | beside—[2]

In the first place in a line, an unstressed monosyllable is also admitted, though rarely, and only in the shorter lines:

From | a thous|and pet|ty rills[3]

2. The *trochee* is a common modulation of the iambic foot, especially in the first place in a line:

Under | the wide and starry sky,[4]

---

[1] *King Lear*, III, ii, 1.
[2] Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, *Poetical Works*, p. 101.
[3] Milton, *Comus*, l. 926.
[4] Stevenson, *Requiem*, *Poems*, p. 8.

where some poets use it almost as frequently as the iambus. It is found in nearly every other position, however:

A noise | like of | a hid|den brook [1]

For what | are men | better | than sheep | or goats [2]

But in the last place it is extremely rare and is very disturbing to the rhythm:

The flash | of arms | and dust | of troops | moving.[3]

3. Of the feet found only in modulation, and incapable of use as bases, the commonest is the *pyrrhic*, the foot of two light syllables:

Thrice wel|come, darl|ing of | the Spring [4]

For they | appeal | from tyr|anny | to God [5]

Whom Un|ivers|al nat|ure did | lament,[6]

The pyrrhic as a rule simply relieves the monotony of too regular stress, but as the last foot of a line it has a faint and often sorrowful cadence:

And I, | the last, | go forth | compan|ionless.[7]

4. The *spondee*, or foot of two heavy syllables, is nearly as common as the pyrrhic and much more noticeable. It often brings in a note of weariness or despair, especially when it follows the regular iamb:

And no | birds sing.[8]

The long | day wanes; | the slow | moon climbs: [9]

---

[1] Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, Poetical Works*, p. 104.
[2] Tennyson, *Morte d'Arthur, Poetical Works*, p. 71.
[3] Bridges, *The Christian Captives*, l. 241. *Poetical Works*, Vol. V, p. 15.
[4] Wordsworth, *To the Cuckoo, Poetical Works*, p. 183.
[5] Byron, *Sonnet on Chillon, Poems*, p. 326.
[6] Milton, *Lycidas*, l. 60. *Poetical Works*, p. 39.
[7] Tennyson, *Morte d'Arthur, Poetical Works*, p. 71.
[8] Keats, *La Belle Dame sans Merci, Poems*, p. 244.
[9] Tennyson, *Ulysses, Poetical Works*, p. 96.

But in the last place it may come with a distinct impression of light and hope:

Brightening | the skirts | of a | long cloud | ran forth.[1]

5. The spondee is not so heavy and solemn in effect when it follows the pyrrhic. This combination formed a base foot in classical verse and was called the *ionic a minore*, ××//.

And the | loud laugh | that spoke | the vac|ant mind.[2]

When repeated as in the line,

To a | green Thought | in a | green Shade[3]

it has a buoyant and bounding motion.

6. Another combination of feet which made a base in classical verse and is a frequent modulation for two iambic feet is the *choriambus*, /××/. Since the trochee is so common as an initial foot, the choriambus at the beginning of a line is so common that it is hardly noticeable:

Full in | the smile | of the | blue firm|ament.[4]

In this line, for example, it is the ionic a minore and not the choriambus that attracts our attention, as being an unusual movement. But elsewhere we hear it more distinctly, especially when it is repeated twice in a line:

For *Lyc|idas* | is dead, | dead ere | his prime.[5]
Day aft|er day, | flight aft|er flight | go forth.[6]

To understand the habits governing the appearance of the various trisyllabic modulations it is necessary to glance at the history of English metre. Our present system of

[1] Tennyson, *Morte d'Arthur*, *Poetical Works*, p. 68.
[2] Goldsmith, *The Deserted Village*, *Poetical Works*, p. 27.
[3] Marvell, *The Garden*, *Poems and Letters*, Vol. I, p. 49.
[4] Keats, 'To one who has been long in city pent.' *Poems*, p. 35.
[5] Milton, *Lycidas*, *Poetical Works*, p. 38.
[6] Crabbe, *The Borough*. Letter I, *Poetical Works*, p. 112.

versification replaced one in which metre as we understand it had no place, the old alliterative system, in which a structural framework was given to each line by the presence of four important or emphatic words, the first three of which were alliterated. The new and less elastic system was transplanted from France, whose language is less subject to alternations of stress than English. The French line consisted of a regular number of syllables. The English imitation of the French line soon fell, owing to the importance of stress in English, into a regular number not of syllables but of feet, potentially capable, from the beginning, of modulation on the lines which centuries of practice have established. But the old respect for number derived from the French system persisted in theory until almost the end of the eighteenth century, and this incomplete theory had a variable but always a more or less important influence on the practice of poets. The disyllabic modulations, which did not make any difference to the number of syllables in the line, were accepted from the first, though even they were sparingly used by the experimental poets before the Age of Elizabeth. The common, though incorrect, definition of a blank verse line even to our own day is that it is a line of ten syllables. From the beginning, however, the end of a line was susceptible of the addition of an extra syllable. This syllable was in English almost invariably unstressed, and turned the last foot into an *amphibrach*, ×/×. The final amphibrach has remained common all through the history of iambic verse except in the couplet verse of Pope's period, when it was rare. The case of the internal amphibrach is less simple. Every French line was supposed to have a slight pause about the middle, called the *césure*,[1] and the attribution of a similar pause to English verse is one of the most flagrant cases of the incubus of tradition. The subdivision of lines as part of their structural plan was not natural to

[1] The *caesura* of Latin verse, from which the name is derived, is quite a different phenomenon, not a pause, but a break between words, where one ends and another begins in the same foot.

English and was never habitual. Where, however, a break did occur, it was felt, owing to the prestige of the French *césure*, that it had a special character. It was sometimes called the caesura and an extra syllable might be admitted there too. This habit had almost dropped out of non-dramatic verse by the middle of the sixteenth century, but was very prevalent in the Elizabethan drama. After that it ceases to be of any importance.

It was long, however, before the other trisyllabic feet came into common use. And the first 'extra' syllables to creep into the rigidly numerical system were naturally those, forming such a large group in English, which can easily be suppressed in pronunciation, or which glide easily into the next syllable.

If two light vowels are separated only by 'n', 'l', or 'r', one of them tends to disappear, though as will be seen from the examples given the degree of suppression is not always the same.

/ × / (×) × / | |
The mult|itud|inous seas | incarn|adine[1]

/ (×) × / | | |
Of per|ilous seas, | in fae|ry lands | forlorn[2]

/ (×) × / | | |
Of cred|ulous hearts, | in heaven |[3]

If one light syllable ends with a vowel, and the next, whether heavy or light, begins with a vowel or 'h', the two adjacent vowel sounds tend to glide together, and one of them approximates to the sound of 'w' or 'y':

/ × (×) / | | |
Which much to have tried, | in much | been baff|led, brings[4]

× (×) / × × × × / ×× | | |
To the is|land-val|ley of | Avil|ion ;[5]

The habit grew up among early printers, and still lingers, of representing this glide or suppression by omitting the suppressed vowel, and printing 'wat'ry' and 'th'earth' or

[1] *Macbeth*, II, ii, 61.
[2] Keats, *Ode to a Nightingale*, *Poems*, p. 192.
[3] Rupert Brooke, *Love*, *Collected Poems*, p. 36.
[4] Arnold, *The Scholar Gipsy*, *Poems*, p. 234.
[5] Tennyson, *Morte d'Arthur*, *Poetical Works*, p. 72.

even, in the sixteenth century, 'watry' and 'thearth', but whether the suppression in pronunciation was more complete then than it is among poets and readers today, we cannot say. The printing convention was not consistent; we have abundant cases in which the elided vowel is printed:

Mine eyes | are made | the fools | o' the oth|er senses [1]

and yet the use of the apostrophe obviously became such a habit that it was sometimes printed instead of a vowel which had to have syllabic value:

In whome | in peace | th'el|ements | all lay.[2]

In Elizabethan poetry the vowels of the verbal endings 'eth' and 'est' and the superlative 'est', and the vowel of 'the' after prepositions, and the vowels of pronouns were apt to lose their syllabic value:

That eyes,| that are | the frail'st | and soft|est things.[3]

Here again the spelling became a habit even where it falsified the pronunciation:

Are you | his broth|er?
Was|'t you | he rescued? [4]

Syllables which prosodists could explain away by one or other of these licences have always been admitted as extra to the strict numerical allowance in iambic verse. The feet which contain them may be distinguished from their unequivocal counterparts by the names of *glide-anapaest, glide-dactyl, etc.*, and even when they are given the fullest possible pronunciation, as is the custom of modern times, they are certainly much less noticeable, and much less disturbing to the monotonous norm of the iambic rhythm, than the full trisyllables.

[1] *Macbeth*, II, ii, 2.
[2] Drayton, *Barrons Warres*, Bk. III, *Poems*, 1605, p. E 7 a.
[3] *As You Like It*, III, v, 12. [4] *As You Like It*, IV, iii, 134.

Full trisyllabic feet were admitted into iambic verse in the breakdown of Elizabethan poetry, when the metrical chaos was so complete that it is no wonder if the following age failed to see where the fault lay, and traced the confusion to the kinds of modulation allowed, rather than to the lack of discretion in their use. The age of Dryden and Pope rejected them completely, returned to a Gallic rigidity, and clung even more to the conventions of printing which disguised the glide-anapaest. The trisyllabic modulations found their way back at the end of the eighteenth century. Coleridge announced them in the preface to *Christabel*, though his description of his own practice was an inadequate one, and they have been accepted modulations ever since.

From the days of Chaucer to the middle of the seventeenth century the alliance between poetry and prosody was not of the closest, and the theoretical restriction as to the number of syllables in a line must not be taken to imply the absolute exclusion of full anapaests from iambic verse. Dramatic poetry at least was never hide-bound. The important point is that the trisyllabic feet were not countenanced. Prosodists would have stigmatised them as blemishes, and most poets would have admitted the charge if challenged. From the middle of the seventeenth century to the end of the eighteenth, poetry became very largely a matter of strict prosody, and during that period anapaests and even amphibrachs within the line were rigidly excluded, and the final amphibrach was rare.

The trisyllabic substitutions are as follows:

7. The *anapaest* is the commonest of the trisyllabic modulations:

Alone | on a wide, | wide sea,

Awake, | my heart, | to be loved, | awake, | awake![1]

Jealous | in hon|our, sudd|en and quick | in quarrel,[2]

[1] Bridges, *Shorter Poems*, Bk. III, No. 15, Works, Vol. II, p. 113.
[2] *As You Like It*, II, vii, 151.

The effect of the glide-anapaest is very much to lighten the movement of the iambic line:

Time's wing|ed char|iot hurr|ying near.[1]

8. Full *dactyls* are rare in iambic verse, but glide-dactyls sometimes take the places in which a trochee would be admitted:

Brightening | the skirts | of a | long cloud, | ran forth.[2]

Obstin|ate sil|ence came | heavily | again,[3]

9. The trisyllabic foot without stress is known as the *tribrach*, ×××. It often has a confused or muffled effect:

The Life, | Death, Mir|acles of | Saint Some|body,[4]

Contin|uous as | the stars | that shine[5]

10. At the end of a line the *amphibrach* is common:

A thing | of beaut|y is | a joy | for ever:[6]

As if his whole | vocation

Were endless im|itation[7]

There are very occasional poems in English which have a pause in the middle of each line, as part of their structure, and at this pause the amphibrach may be found:

I have | seen dawn | and sunset || on moors | and wind|y hills

Coming | in sol|emn beauty || like slow | old tunes | of Spain:[8]

---

[1] Marvell, *To his Coy Mistress, Poems and Letters*, Vol. I, p. 26.
[2] Tennyson, *Morte d'Arthur, Poetical Works*, p. 68.
[3] Keats, *Endymion*, Bk. II, 1, 335, *Poems*, p. 82.
[4] Browning, *The Ring and the Book*, Bk. I, l. 80, *Poems*, Vol. II, p. 2.
[5] Wordsworth, 'I wandered lonely as a cloud,' *Poetical Works*, p. 187.
[6] Keats, *Endymion*, Bk. I, l. i, *Poems*, p. 53.
[7] Wordsworth, *Ode on the Intimations of Immortality*, l. 106, *Poetical Works*, p. 589.
[8] Masefield, *Beauty, Poetical Works*, p. 62.

The group of words ending in ' ven ', ' Heaven ', ' given ', and also the word ' spirit ', are traditionally allowed to introduce an amphibrach into the middle of a line:

Are driven, | like ghosts | from an | enchant|er fleeing, [1]

Toward Heav'ns | descent | had slop'd | his west|ering wheel [2]

A gent|le spirit, | that light|ly did | delay [3]

11. An extended spondee at the end of a line, as the amphibrach is an extended iamb, gives us the *bacchius*, //×:

Some kinds | of baseness

Are nob|ly und|ergone, | and most | poor matters
Point to | rich ends [4]

Down in | the blue-bells, or | a wren | light rustling [5]

12. Rarely, at the end of a line a heavy syllable is added instead of a light one, forming an *antibacchius*, ×//:

To sil|ence en|vious tongues. | Be just, | and fear not: [6]

An example with a glide-syllable, giving a spondaic effect, occurs in the line:

The old ord|er chang|eth, yield|ing place | to new. [7]

13. The final foot may be doubly extended, giving us a quadrisyllabic foot called a *second paeon*: [8]

My lord, | I came | to see | your fath|er's funeral [9]

You fool|ish shep|herd, where|fore do | you follow her [10]

---

[1] Shelley, *Ode to the West Wind*, *Poetical Works*, p. 573.
[2] Milton, *Lycidas*, l. 31, *Poetical Works*, p. 38.
[3] Spenser, *Prothalamion*, l. 3, *Poetical Works*, p. 601
[4] *The Tempest*, III, i, ll. 2–4.
[5] Keats, *Endymion*, Bk. I, l. 451, *Poems*, p. 63.
[6] *King Henry VIII*, III, ii, 446.
[7] Tennyson, *Morte d'Arthur*, *Poetical Works*, p. 71.
[8] The paeon is a foot of four syllables only one which is stressed, and is a first, second, third, or fourth paeon according to the position of the stress, /×××, ×/××, ××/×, ×××/.
[9] *Hamlet*, I, ii, 176. [10] *As You Like It*, III, v, 49.

14. A rare variant for the final paeon is the *ionic a majore*, //× × :

× / × / × × × / / / × ×
And mo | divers|ity | of sounds, | all horrible.[1]

15. A spondee may be expanded by a light syllable between the two heavy ones, into a *cretic*, /×/:

/ (×) / (×) × /
Were it well | to obey | then, if | a king | demand [2]

The investigation of verse by means of this kind is *scansion*. In scanning a piece of verse we mark every syllable as it is pronounced, and try to divide the line into feet in such a way as to show exactly which group of syllables represents every foot of the base. Scansion must never distort the actual speech rhythm.

Rhyme

Rhyme is generally the accompaniment of stanza form, though it is not limited to stanzaic verse. Verses may be rhymed in pairs or couplets, and rhyme also appears in some kinds of irregular verse. Two lines rhyme when their last stressed syllables have the same vowel sound, and all sounds which follow, vowel or consonant, are identical. When the heavy syllable is the last in the line we have single rhyme, as in 'day-way', 'hill-mill'. When the stressed syllable is followed by one or two light syllables we have double or triple rhyme, 'morrow-sorrow', 'never-sever', 'airily-warily'. Iambic and anapaestic verse generally have single rhyme, though an extra syllable may be added to the last foot of each of the lines, to effect double rhyme. Complete trochaic lines have double rhyme, and complete dactyllic triple rhyme, but in trochaic and dactyllic verse the unstressed syllables of the last foot are often omitted, so that we have the easier and more normal single rhyme. Triple rhyme is rare except in humorous verse.

[1] *The Tempest*, V, i, l. 234.
[2] Tennyson, *Morte d'Arthur*, *Poetical Works*, p. 69.

The consonant sound which comes before the rhyming vowel should not be the same in two lines. The words 'sighed-side-beside' do not truly rhyme, though in the earlier days of English metrical verse there was not such a prejudice against this phenomenon, and it is admitted in French, being known by the French name of *rime riche*.

In practice poets often use imperfect rhyme of various kinds.

1. Among the uncertain metrists of the sixteenth century it was not uncommon to rhyme the last syllable of an iambus with the last syllable of the amphibrach in an extended line, and even more common when the normal line ended in a pyrrhic instead of an iambus:

Let me | remem|ber my | mishappes | unhappy,
That me | betide | in May | most com|monly:[1]

So chanc|eth me | that eu|ery pas|sion
. . . . . .
Whereby, | if that | I laugh | at any season[2]

2. Rime riche is now very seldom admitted by good poets, but Keats has

And from beneath a sheltering ivy leaf
Takes glimpses of thee; thou art a relief[3]

3. Much more common is imperfect vowel rhyme, often induced by similarity of spelling between words not pronounced alike, as 'home-come'. Rossetti in *The White Ship*, without the excuse of similar spelling, has

And when to the chase his court would crowd,
The poor flung ploughshares on his road
And shrieked: 'Our cry is from King to God!'[4]

In *Rose Mary* he has double rhymes imperfect in both

[1] *Songes and Sonettes*, p. E 4 b.
[2] *Songes and Sonettes*, p. F 1 a.
[3] *Endymion*, III, ll. 65–6, *Poems*, p. 99.
[4] *The White Ship*, *Poetical Works*, p. 137.

vowels, ' apparel-Beryl ',[1] and similarly Mrs. Browning, in *The Lost Bower*, rhymes ' marvel ' with ' travail '.[2] Even Pope and the purists of his day have ' care-are ', ' Heaven-given ', as well as many rhymes which change in pronunciation has rendered imperfect to our ears.

There seems always to have been a special licence in favour of the Latin final ' a ', which is allowed to rhyme with an English long ' a ' (ay). Browning in *Home Thoughts from the Sea* rhymes ' Africa ' with ' lay ' and ' bay ',[3] and Shelley in *Adonais* twice rhymes ' Urania ' with ' lay '.[4]

4. Rhyme may be imperfect in the consonants which follow the vowel. In this case we have *assonance* and not rhyme, but in early days assonance, as ' dog-rod ', was accepted instead of rhyme. The only type of this imperfection which is at all common now is the case where one word has the voiced and the other the unvoiced form of the same consonant sound, as ' ease-peace '. Rossetti in *Rose Mary* has ' oars-course ',[5] and in *The Blessed Damozel* ' pierce-spheres '.[6] One type of consonantly imperfect rhyme is the so-called Cockney rhyme, where one word has ' r ' after the vowel and the other not, as ' dawn-morn '. This is now quite acceptable to a Southern ear, though still intolerable to a Scot, but it is generally avoided for tradition's sake.

5. Rhyme may be imperfect in both vowel and consonant. Mrs. Browning was always lax about rhyme, and *The Lost Bower* affords some amazing specimens of double rhyme, such as ' doorway-for me ',[7] ' glossy-closely '.[8] Tennyson, in *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, is satisfied to rhyme ' hundred ' with ' blundered ' and ' wondered ',[9] while

[1] *Rose Mary, Poetical Works*, p. 135.
[2] *The Lost Bower*, Stanza XIII, *Poetical Works*, p. 241.
[3] *Home Thoughts from the Sea, Poetical Works*, Vol. I, p. 273.
[4] *Adonais*, ll. 10–12, 204–207, *Poetical Works*, pp. 427, 432.
[5] *Rose Mary, Poetical Works*, p. 107.
[6] *The Blessed Damozel, Poetical Works*, p. 233.
[7] *The Lost Bower*, LXXIV, *Poetical Works*, p. 246.
[8] *The Lost Bower*, XXIV, *Poetical Works*, p. 242.
[9] *The Charge of the Light Brigade, Poetical Works*, p. 222.

Hood, who on the whole manages triple rhyme excellently in *The Bridge of Sighs*, breaks down once with 'evidence-eminence-providence'.[1]

6. A common licence with early poets, which was revived in the nineteenth century, was to rhyme a heavy syllable with one naturally light, which has then to be given a certain weight in order to bear the rhyme. Again Rossetti supplies us with abundant examples:

> And Venus victrix to my heart doth bring
> Herself, the Helen of her guerdoning [2]

Morris also often rhymes a weak with a strong '-ing', but Keats and Rossetti go further and rhyme a weak syllable with a strong one which has not the same vowel sound, 'tell-invisible',[3] 'breeze-rushes'.[4]

Rhyme links lines together in various ways. Every line of a poem may rhyme with some other, as in the sonnet or Spenserian stanza, or some lines may be unrhymed as in ballad stanza where only the alternate lines rhyme. A rhyme scheme in stanzaic verse is generally fixed as rigidly as the number of feet in a line or lines in a stanza, and does not vary from stanza to stanza.

The function of rhyme is generally to emphasise the integrity and separateness of the stanza, or of the sections of some complex form such as the sonnet, which it binds together. It also gives a pleasure of its own, falling on the ear with the effect of an echo. It may, however, contribute not to separation but to continuity, as in the form *terza rima*, the measure of Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind*, where the second line of every three-lined stanza rhymes with the first and third of the next stanza. There is also internal or leonine rhyme where some word within the line, usually at the end of the first half, rhymes with the

[1] *The Bridge of Sighs*, *Poetical Works*, p. 649.
[2] *The House of Life*, XXXIII, *Poetical Works*, p. 193.
[3] *Rose Mary*, *Poetical Works*, p. 109.
[4] *Rose Mary*, *Poetical Works*, p. 107.

end of the line. Internal rhyme may be incidental, as it is in some stanzas of *The Ancient Mariner*:

In mist or cloud, on mast or shroud,[1]

or it may be structural, as in the following verses from Flecker's *Hassan* where the first half of the second line rhymes with the first and second halves of the first:

We are they who come faster than fate: we are they who ride early or late:
We storm at your ivory gate: Pale Kings of the Sunset, beware.[2]

In either case it has the effect of breaking the line into two definite halves, which might almost as well be written separately, because the voice naturally pauses on rhyme, and even if the sense runs on, it is difficult to avoid a break.

Another and rarer kind of internal rhyme, instead of linking half-lines together, links two sections within the line, leaving end-rhyme to operate in the usual way. In the example following it will be noticed that the first internal rhyme is actually a rime riche, though it is made less striking than usual by the division of the words:

O Night, whom other but thee for mother, and Death for the father, Night,
Shall we dream to discover, save thee and thy lover, to bring such a sorrow to sight.[3]

---

[1] *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, *Poetical Works*, p. 97.
[2] *Hassan*, Act III, Sc. iii, p. 104.
[3] Swinburne, *Erechtheus*, *Poetical Works*, Vol. IV, p. 354.

CHAPTER II

THE FOUR-FOOT COUPLET

THE simplest metrical group is the couplet of two similarly constructed lines, bound together by rhyme, and a great body of verse exists in English both in the four-foot and in the five-foot couplet. The four-foot couplet is indeed the oldest form of metrical verse in our literature, with a history from the very beginning of foot rhythm. When the tunes of the strictly syllabic continental verse came to the ears of English poets, and joined with other causes in the breaking down of the old alliterative system, the four strong syllables or four beats of the Old English line were taken over into the lines of syllabic uniformity, and it was natural that the eight-syllabled French line should therefore be the first to establish itself, as a line of four disyllabic feet. The four-foot couplet made its appearance in a Paternoster, as early as the twelfth century, became the staple measure until Chaucer enlarged the range of English metre, and has persisted in one form or another ever since, though after the early transition time it has never held the same paramount position.

By the second half of the thirteenth century three varieties of couplet had emerged, foreshadowing the three lines of developement which remained distinct throughout its later history.

The Owl and the Nightingale, modelled on the French octosyllabic couplet, is written with strict attention to syllabic uniformity, but without a certain ear for rhythm,

so that the stresses fall as they may, and the iambic character of the line is not kept clear. With syllabic strictness and a rigidly observed pause at the end of each line, the rhythm cannot, of course, go far wrong; a large number of iambic feet are bound to appear; but the movement, at best, is primitive and monotonous:

Þo stod | on old | stoc þar | bi-side,
þar þo | vle | song hir|e tide,
& was | mid iu|i al | bi-growe:
hit was | þare hu|le eard|ing-stowe.[1]

It will be noticed that Middle English, with its many words ending in 'e', which was then sounded, can hardly do without the double ending or final amphibrach.

About contemporary with *The Owl and the Nightingale* we have a version in couplets of *Genesis and Exodus*, whose anonymous compiler had a much more prophetic sense of the true genius of English poetry. He is not at all strict as to the number of syllables, and gains variety with trisyllabic feet, but his modulations are rhythmically sound; the rising character of the metre is never lost, nor do we need to distort pronunciation in order to keep it. The rhythm is still, however, built up in lines; there is hardly more overflow than in the stricter poem:

Ioseph | was son(e) | in prisun | ðo hogt,
And shau|en, and clad, | and to | him brogt;
ðe king | him bad | ben hard|i and bold,
If he | can rechen | ðis drem|es wold;[2]

In *Havelok the Dane*, which was perhaps a little later, we find the form in which the first foot is often a monosyllable, so that the metre hovers between iambic and trochaic rhythm, the seven syllables falling sometimes into

[1] *The Owl and the Nightingale*, ll. 25 ff., p. 6.
[2] *Genesis and Exodus*, p. 61.

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one form, /|×/|×/|×/, and sometimes into the other, /×|/×|/×|/, but the monosyllabic opening is only a modulation, and the iambic rhythm prevails:

He | is drenched in | the flod,
About|en his hals | an ank|er god;
He | is wit|erlik|e ded,
Eteth | he neu|re mor|e bred;
He | lip drench|ed in | pe se:[1]

A developement in the expressive use of disyllabic modulations is noticeable in the pyrrhics and spondees of the above.

Throughout the Middle English period, the four-foot couplet was widely practised, and the four-foot line, especially in its freer form, was further developed, sometimes in combination with others, as the foundation of many of the complicated stanza forms which were inspired by French ingenuity, and were so popular in the romances and lyrics. But the advances were not great. Just before Chaucer, another immense religious poem, the *Cursor Mundi*, written strictly on the whole, makes occasional clumsy attempts at overflow:

And sum | sais bot | pe nest | yeire→
Foluand, ‖ and sum, | wit res|un sere,
Sais, ‖ yere eft|er pai | com.[2]

Chaucer practised the four-foot couplet in *The Romaunt of the Rose* and *The Boke of the Duchesse*, and handled it with easy mastery in *The Hous of Fame*. The lines move easily and naturally, with overflow, and an occasional heptasyllabic line, and, above all, we feel that the poet is

[1] *Havelok the Dane*, p. 21.
[2] *Cursor Mundi*, Version I, Cotton Vesp. A III, ll. 11377 ff., Vol. II p. 652.

in full command of his words, and can marshal them without harshness or violence into beautiful order:

> But cert|eynly, | I nist|e never→
> Wher that | I was, | but wel | wiste I,
> Hit was | of Ven|us red|ely,→
> The temp|le; || for, | in port|reyture
> I saw | anoon-|right hir | figure
> Nak|ed flet|inge in | a see.
> And al|so on | hir heed, | parde,
> Her ros|e-garl|ond whyt | and reed,
> And | her comb | to kembe | hir heed,
> Hir dow|ves, and | daun Cu|pido,
> Hir blind|e sone, | and Vul|cano,
> That in | his fac|e was | ful broun.[1]

It will be noticed that Chaucer not only breaks the line with pauses at any place, but also breaks the couplet having often an important grammatical pause after the first line of a couplet, as after the sixth line above, and at the end. This is one of the secrets of his ease and naturalness. But he always knows when liberty should be checked. After his time in England there was a great collapse of poetic power, and not least in the field of prosody. In the case of prosody the breakdown was largely due to the rapidity with which pronunciation was changing, and in particular to the disappearance of the final 'e'. Poets hardly knew where they stood, and were soon plunged in rhythmic chaos; even those like Chaucer's contemporary, Gower, and the Scottish poets, who did keep clear of the morass, did so by clinging to the prop of the eight syllables, and were very far from bettering Chaucer's achievement. The following lines of typical Scottish work show the dulling effect of unbroken endstopping, in spite of some competent modulation, and also, in the last line, the snare into

[1] *The Hous of Fame*, Book I, ll. 128 ff. *Works*, Vol. III, p. 5.

which a poet is led by counting syllables and misplacing stress:

That his hie honour suld not smure,
Consid|ering quhat | he did | indure,
Oft tim|es, for | his Lad|eis sake.
I wait, Sir Lancelote du lake,
Quhen he | did lufe | King Arth|uris wyfe,
Faucht nev|er better, || with sword | nor knife,
For his | Ladie, | in no | battell ; [1]

When the difficulties began to clear away, and the metrical sense to reassert itself, interest was largely centred on new forms; the five-foot line took chief place; the sonnet was discovered, and blank verse born; long lines were favoured by drama, and many types of verse arose which were not to survive. The four-foot couplet was not forgotten, but it was not now considered a worthy vehicle for the highest poetic endeavour.

Scattered among the prose works of Robert Greene, we find, among other poetical interpolations, passages of the 'Havelok' or heptasyllabic variety of couplet; some of the lines, having double ending, already show plainly the tendency to lapse into trochaic rhythm characteristic of the measure in the hands of later versifiers:

Walk|ing in | a vall|ey greene,
Spred | with Flor|a sum|mer queene:
Where | shee heap|ing all | hir graces,
Niggard seemd in other places.
Spring it was and heere did spring,
All that nature forth can bring: [2]

This was the type that was destined to survive in the drama, for it is the heptasyllabic couplet with which we are familiar in Shakespeare, in songs like 'Where the bee

[1] Lindsay, *Historie of Squyer Meldrum*, *Works*, E.E.T.S., p. 322.
[2] *Ciceronis Amor*, p. H 1 a and b.

sucks', in oracular passages like the casket verses in *The Merchant of Venice*,

> You that choose not by the view,
> Chance as fair and choose as true.[1]

and in the declamatory four-foot couplets like the valedictory epilogues spoken by Puck and Prospero to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*. Couplets of this type occupy a large place in Fletcher's *The Faithfull Shepheardesse*, and obviously point forward to Milton:

> Now whilst | the moone doth rule the sky,
> × /
> And | the starres, | whose feeb|le light
> / × / / × ×
> Give a | pale shad|ow to | the night,
> / /
> Are up, || great *Pan* | commaund|ed me
> To walk | this grove | about, | whilst he
> × ×
> In | a corn|er of | the wood,
> Where nev|er mort|all foote | hath stood,
> × ×
> Keeps danc|ing, mus|icke and | a feast,
> To in|tertaine | a loue|ly guest:[2]

The heptasyllable appears to much the same tune among the late Elizabethan and Jacobean poets outside the drama, in the works of William Browne and George Wither, of whose couplets a few characteristic lines follow, Browne's with a certain amount of overflow,

> Roget, droope not, see the spring→
> ×
> Is | the earth enamelling,
> ×
> And | the birds on euery Tree
> Greete this morne with melody;[3]

and Wither's without,

> Neu|er did the *Nine* impart
> × / / × ×
> The || sweet sec|rets of | their Art,
> Vn|to any that did scorne,
> We | should see their fauours worn.[4]

---

[1] *The Merchant of Venice*, III, ii, 131–2.
[2] *The Faithfull Shepheardesse*, III, ii, 168 ff., p. E 4 b.
[3] *The Shepheards Pipe*, First Eclogue, ll. 1–4, p. B 1 a.
[4] *Shepherd's Hunting*, Eclogue IV, *Juvenilia*, p. L1 7 b.

The chief weakness of all these charming Elizabethan heptasyllables is their tendency to let a weak or light monosyllable take the place of the first foot. This brings the almost inevitable temptation to put an unnatural stress on the syllable. On the other hand, unvaried heptasyllables with a strong monosyllable for the first foot, have a somewhat hard and mechanical regularity.

Milton avoided these dangers by using his heptasyllables, whether with heavy or light opening, only as a modulation, and always interspersing them with octosyllables:

> The Star | that bids | the Shep|herd fold,
> Now | the top | of Heav'n | doth hold,
> And | the gild|ed Car | of Day,
> His glow|ing Ax|le doth | allay
> In | the steep | *Atlant|ick* stream,[1]

As few of the Elizabethans had been, and much more even than Greene, he was haunted in writing his octosyllabics by the dancing sprite of trochaic rhythm:

> Streit mine eye hath caught new pleasures
> Whilst the Lantskip round it measures,[2]

But like a true sprite, it is no sooner caught than lost again, or only mocking us with an echo in a 'line of seven', which might be either iambic or trochaic. There are, in fact, in *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* very few completely trochaic passages, and few passages of unbroken 'sevens'. The charm of Milton's four-foot technique is its continuous variety, the lightness and rapidity with which the iambic movement glides into trochaic, or hovers bewitchingly between the two, in lines of seven or nine syllables, the nines, light at both the beginning and the end, being an innovation of Milton's:

[1] *Comus*, ll. 93 ff., *Poetical Works*, p. 51.
[2] *L'Allegro*, ll. 69–70, *Poetical Works*, p. 22.

But hail | thou God|des, sage | and holy,
Hail | divin|est Mel|ancholy,
Whose Saint|ly vis|age is | too bright→
To hit | the Sense | of hum|an sight;
And ther|fore to | our weak|er view,
Ore laid | with black | staid Wis|doms hue.
Black, | but such | as in | esteem,
Prince *Mem|non's* sis|ter might | beseem,
Or that | Starr'd *Eth|iope* Queen | that strove→
To set | her beaut|ies praise | above→
The Sea | Nymphs, || and | their pow|ers offended.[1]

Milton's modulations are all illustrated in the above few lines, the spondee after a pyrrhic in lines thirteen and fifteen, and with characteristically Miltonic gravity after an iambus in lines sixteen and nineteen. Milton hardly ever uses a full anapaest, but occasionally a glide-anapaest, as in line nineteen. Overflow, such as gives us the splendid sweep of the last three lines, is rare.

Milton's contemporary, Andrew Marvell, wrote the pure octosyllabic couplet with rare delicacy and distinction, and a very interesting technique. He has little overflow, and no modulations but the disyllabic ones of pyrrhic, spondee, and trochee. He seems to have, however, a peculiar fondness for those pairs of feet, the choriambus and the ionic a minore, which keep a nice balance of stresses:

O Thou, that dear and happy Isle
The Gard|en of | the World ere while,
Thou *Paradise* of four Seas,
Which *Heaven* planted us to please,
But, to | exclude | the World, did guard
With wat|ry if not flam|ing Sword;
What luckless Apple did we tast,
To make us Mort|al, and | The Wast?[2]

[1] *Il Penseroso*, ll. 11 ff., *Poetical Works*, p. 24.
[2] *Appleton House*, ll. 321 ff., *Poems and Letters*, Vol. I, p. 69.

The choriambic movement may come twice in a line:

/ × × / / × × /
Lillies without, Roses within.[1]

And the persistence with which the ionic a minore or a similar effect, gained with trochee and spondee, haunts the word ' green ' is most curious. Seven or eight instances may be found, the most remarkable being the double ionic in *The Garden*:

× × / / × × / /
To a green Thought in a green Shade[2]

and another equally well-known one describes oranges,

× × / /
Like golden lamps in a green Night[3]

In one poem, *To his Coy Mistress*, Marvell breaks his habit of endstopping with most gratifying effect. Many of the finest couplets of this exquisite poem owe their charm to overflow from a pause in the first line to the end of the second, or to running without a break across the end of the first line:

Let us roll all our Strength, || and all→
Our sweetness, || up into one Ball.[4]

Thus, || though we cannot make our Sun→
Stand still, || yet we will make him run.[5]

And overflow even between couplets occurs:

Thou by the *Indian Ganges* side→
Should'st Rubies find: || I by the Tide→
Of *Humber* would complain. || I would→
Love you ten years before the Flood:[6]

It is in the same poem that he ventures on the shyest

[1] *The Nymph and her Fawn*, l. 92, *Poems and Letters*, Vol. I, p. 24.
[2] *The Garden*, ll. 48 ff., *Poems and Letters*, Vol. I, p. 49.
[3] *The Bermudas*, l. 18, *Poems and Letters*, Vol. I, p. 17.
[4] *To his Coy Mistress*, ll. 41–2, *Poems and Letters*, Vol. I, p. 27.
[5] *To his Coy Mistress*, ll. 45–6, *Poems and Letters*, Vol. I, p. 27.
[6] *To his Coy Mistress*, ll. 5 ff., *Poems and Letters*, Vol. I, p. 26.

of anapaests, with every justification, but this source of beauty he does not further explore than in,

Time's wing|ed Char|(×)×riot hurr|(×)×ying near:[1]

The four-foot couplets written during the ascendancy of the heroic couplet nearly all share the qualities which distinguish the more popular measure, the mechanical proficiency and jog-trot, which absence of modulation and overflow give to the following verses of Gay:

Since ev'ry beast alive can tell
That I sincerely wish you well,
I may, without offence, pretend
To take the freedom of a friend;[2]

In such a measure punctuation is vain; we cannot stop before we reach the end of a line, nor help stopping when we do reach it. It is all we can do not to stress 'of' in the last line.

L'Allegro and *Il Penseroso* have an unmistakable progeny in Parnell's *Hymn to Contentment* and Dyer's *Grongar Hill*, where the admixture of 'sevens' gives some variety to the movement, though they are apt to come in batches and not interspersedly. Imitations of Milton's vocabulary strengthen the echo in *Grongar Hill*, but, with insistent endstopping, Dyer's rhythm, though sweet enough, has little range:

Below | me trees unnumber'd rise,
Beaut|iful in various dies:
The gloomy pine, the poplar blue,
The yellow beech, the sable yew,
The slender firr, that taper grows,
The sturdy oak with broad-spread boughs,
And | beyond the purple grove,
Haunt | of Phillis, queen of love!
Gawd|y as the op'ning dawn,
Lies | a long and level lawn,
On which | a dark hill steep and high,
Holds | and charms the wand'ring Eye![3]

[1] *To his Coy Mistress*, l. 22, *Poems and Letters*, Vol. I, p. 26.
[2] *The Hare and Many Friends*, Fables, p. 172.
[3] *Grongar Hill*, p. D 1 b.

Parnell has more volume and undulation, and even manages occasional overflow, and some good pause effects:

> No re|al Happiness is found→
> In trail|ing Purple o'er the Ground:
> Or in | a Soul exalted high,
> To range | the Circuit of the Sky,
> Converse | with Stars above, and know→
> All Nat|ure in its Forms below;
> The Rest | it seeks, || in seeking dies, ||
> And Doubts | at last for Knowledge rise.[1]

Lady Winchilsea's *The Tree* is in flat, jogging octosyllabics, but her *To the Nightingale* has batches of the shortened lines, which do not echo Milton, and have sometimes a piercing quality of their own:

> She | begins, || Let all be still!
> Muse, || thy Promise now fulfill!
> Sweet, || oh! sweet, || still sweeter yet
> Can | thy Words such Accents fit,
> Canst | thou Syllables refine,
> Melt | a Sense that shall retain
> Still | some Spirit of the Brain,
> Till | with sounds like these it join.[2]

Ambrose Philips used unvaried heptasyllables of a very graceful and airy character, often opening with a light syllable, and almost invariably endstopped, for some of his 'namby-pamby' verses:

> When the Meadows next are seen,
> Sweet Enamel! white and green,
> And the Year, in fresh Attire,
> Welcomes every gay Desire;
> Blooming-on, shalt Thou appear,
> More Inviting than the Year,
> Fairer Sight than Orchard shows,
> Which beside a River blows.[3]

The 'familiar' style in the four-foot couplet is heard in the writings of Swift and Matthew Green. In Swift's

[1] *Hymn to Contentment, Poems on Several Occasions*, p. 160.
[2] *To the Nightingale*, ll. 14 ff., *Miscellany Poems*, p. 201.
[3] *Ode to Miss Carteret*, pp. 2–3.

hands the metre often has the colloquial ease and fluency of Pope's heroic couplet in the Epistles, and shows the same skill in incorporating talk:

From Dublin soon to London spread,
'Tis told at court, 'the Dean is dead.'
Kind Lady Suffolk, in the spleen,
Runs laughing up to tell the queen.
The queen, so gracious, mild, and good,
Cries, 'Is he gone! 'tis time he shou'd.
He's dead, you say; why, let him rot:
I'm glad the medals were forgot.'[1]

There is no admixture of 'sevens', and not much modulation except internal pause. Green is stiffer and not so fluent, but he has rather more foot modulation. An antithetical tinge, in the manner of the heroic couplet, is also noticeable:

As men at land see storms at sea,
And laugh at miserable elves,
Not kind, so much as to themselves,
Curst with such souls of base alloy,
× × × / × \ × /
As can possess, || but not enjoy.[2]

The measure appears again in Burns, with the swift, rollicking, but rather uneven and slipshod pace that is characteristic of him. There are sometimes heavy modulations, through which the verse rides, rather hampered, to the invariable endstop. Double rhyme is frequent.

Before him Doon pours all his floods;
/ ×
The doub|ling storm | roars thro'| the woods;
The lightnings flash from pole to pole;
Near and more near the thunders roll:
/ // × × / × /
When, || glim|mering thro' | the groan|ing trees,
Kirk-Alloway seem'd in a bleeze,
Thro' ilka bore the beams were glancing,
And loud resounded mirth and dancing.[3]

Coleridge thought that in *Christabel* he had discovered an entirely new technical principle. Of the metre of his

[1] *On the Death of Dr. Swift*, *Poems*, Vol. I, p. 252.
[2] *The Spleen*, in Dodsley, *Collection of Poems by Several Hands*, Vol. I, p. C 4 a.
[3] *Tam o' Shanter*, *Poetry*, Vol. I, p. 282.

poem he tells us that it ' is not, properly speaking, irregular, though it may seem so from its being founded on a new principle : namely, that of counting in each line the accents, not the syllables. Though the latter may vary from seven to twelve, yet in each line the accents will be found to be only four. Nevertheless, this occasional variation in the number of syllables is not introduced wantonly, or for mere ends of convenience, but in correspondence with some transition in the nature of the imagery or passion.' [1] But Coleridge need not have looked far in his own poem to find that he is not right about the accents or stresses being always four in number. There are often three or five. But what each line *has*, in spite of its varying number of syllables, is four feet. Coleridge simply applied rather more freely than usual the natural English principle of modulation, rediscovering, in fact, the *Genesis and Exodus* type of four-foot couplet, and using it with the metrical art taught by four and a half centuries of unceasing labour and experiment. With the free trisyllabic substitution of the *Genesis and Exodus* couplet he blends the hepta-syllabic type, and the result is a variety and flexibility hitherto unknown.

About the same time Blake, of whom Coleridge knew nothing, was writing *Auguries of Innocence* and *The Everlasting Gospel* in a free form of the couplet with much trisyllabic substitution. Occasionally he manages the free iambic rhythm quite well :

> Was Jes|us humb|le ? or | did He→
> Give an|y proofs | of humil|ity ?
> Boast of | high things | with humb|le tone,
> And give | with char|ity | a stone ? [2]

But Blake was careless of rhythm, and the greater part of his efforts in this measure, especially as more trisyllabic feet are admitted, only serves to show what chaos can result

[1] Preface to *Christabel*, 1816.
[2] *The Everlasting Gospel*, γ, 1–5, *Poetical Works*, p. 149.

from this freedom, and what pitfalls Coleridge avoided. Such lines as the following are only too common:

> God can only be known by His attributes;
> And as for the indwelling of the Holy Ghost . . .[1]
>
> If he had been Antichrist, Creeping Jesus, . . .[2]

The reader may attempt to scan them if he will.

In *Christabel* the same liberty is controlled, and never becomes licence. The greater proportion of the lines are completely iambic. Heptasyllables, when they occur, usually come singly, coupled with complete lines:

> A lad|y so richly clad as she—
> Beaut|iful exceedingly.[3]

Sometimes they have the light monosyllabic opening. The anapaests in the staple of the metre are not very frequent, rather less so as a rule than in the following lines:

> And drew | in her breath | with a hiss|ing sound:
>
> Whereat | the Knight | turn'd wild|ly round,
>
> And noth|ing saw, | but his own | sweet maid
> With eyes | upraised, | as one | that prayed.[4]

But when they do come in any quantity, they are most liable to change the measure completely to anapaestic, and generally come as the accompaniment of anger, fear, or violent emotion, as they express Sir Leoline's wrath in,

> He spake: | his eye | in light|ning rolls!
> For the lad|y was ruth|lessly seiz'd, | and he kenn'd
> In the beaut|iful lad|y the child | of his friend![5]

Anapaestic passages also seem to hover round the nameless danger haunting Christabel, and a full rush of anapaests carries Geraldine's curse upon her:

> In the touch | of this bos|om there work|eth a spell,
> Which is lord | of thy utt|erance, Christ|abel!
>
> Thou know|est tonight, | and wilt know | tomorrow
>
> This mark | of my shame, | this seal | of my sorrow;[6]

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[1] *The Everlasting Gospel*, γ, 44–45, *Poetical Works*, p. 150.
[2] *The Everlasting Gospel*, γ, 59, *Poetical Works*, p. 151.
[3] *Christabel*, p. 7.
[4] *Christabel*, p. 35.
[5] *Christabel*, p. 34.
[6] *Christabel*, p. 18.

But when Coleridge admits a heavier foot, the cretic or antibacchius, which is acceptable in anapaestic measure, we feel it to drag on the ear in a place where the anapaests themselves are only allowed, as it were, by courtesy:

Save the boss | of the shield | of Sir Le|oline tall,
Which hung | in a murk|y old nitch | on the wall.[1]

Coleridge makes much use of the common modulations, trochee, spondee, and pyrrhic. He often ends a paragraph with a line containing a pyrrhic:

In eyes | so in|nocent | and blue![2]
Is fast|ened to | an an|gel's feet.[3]

and he even has a pyrrhic at the end, which is rare in iambic verse:

And lay | down in | her love|liness.[4]

He wisely braces up the fluid measure by habitual end-stopping, but sometimes uses overflow very beautifully:

Her limbs relax, her countenance→
Grows sad and soft; the smooth thin lids→
Close o'er her eyes; and tears she sheds—
Large tears that leave the lashes bright!
And oft the while she seems to smile
As in|fants at | a sud|den light![5]

The last lines show how Coleridge sometimes departs from the couplet arrangement, varying it by quatrain and other rhyme schemes, a process which Byron carried, with all other of Coleridge's modulations, to excess, when writing, as he frequently did, in the same metre.

Of the other romantic poets, Shelley and Keats wrote mainly in the heptasyllabic form, Shelley, for instance, in

[1] *Christabel*, p. 13. [2] *Christabel*, p. 43.
[3] *Christabel*, p. 14. [4] *Christabel*, p. 17. [5] *Christabel*, p. 22.

the *Lines Written among the Euganean Hills*, Keats in the 'odes' of 1818, *To Fancy*, *To the Poets*, and *On the Mermaid Tavern*.

Shelley's lines are nearly all 'sevens'. Out of 374 lines there are only 34 complete iambic, and 20 complete trochaic. This heavily stressed line, even when it opens with the treacherous light monosyllable, has a monotonous tramp through the major part of the poem. Only the splendour and colour of the words save a passage like this, which owes nothing to the metre:

/ × / × / × /
So their plumes of purple grain,
/ × / × / × /
Starred with drops of golden rain,
/ × / × / \ /
Gleam above the sunlight woods,
× × / × / × ×
As in silent multitudes
× × / × / × /
On the morning's fitful gale
\ × / × / × /
Through the broken mist they sail,[1]

The verse needs frequent lightening and hastening, which unfortunately seems to mean weakening also, with pyrrhics, which may have to bear the rhyme in two consecutive lines:

× × / × / × ×
When the dreamer seems to be→
/ (×) × × × / ××
Weltering through eternity[2]

But when Shelley breaks free of the drowsing beat of the endstopped sevens, he can produce effects of extraordinary richness and expressiveness, with a blend of complete trochaic, complete iambic, and heptasyllabic lines, admitting overflow:

[1] *Lines written among the Euganean Hills*, ll. 80 ff., *Poetical Works*, p. 551.
[2] *Lines written among the Euganean Hills*, ll. 17–18, *Poetical Works*, p. 550.

The spark | beneath | his feet | is dead,
He starts | to see | the flames | it fed
Howl|ing through | the dark|ened sky
With a myr|iad tongues | victori|ously,
And sinks | down | in fear : | so thou,
O Tyr|anny, | beholdest now.
Light | around | thee, || and | thou hearest→
The loud | flames | ascend, | and fearest :
Grov|el on | the earth ; | ay, || hide→
In | the dust | thy purp|le pride ![1]

Never have more magnificent harmonies been achieved in the four-foot measure.

The measure of Keats's 'odes' is unmistakably trochaic, and has the light tripping motion well suited to the whimsical and delicate fancies expressed. The lines are nearly all heptasyllabic, with some light, and a few true iambic, openings :

I have | heard that | on a | day
Mine host's | sign-board | flew a|way,
Nobody knew whither, till
An astrologer's old quill
To a sheepskin gave the story,
Said he saw you in your glory,
Underneath a new old-sign
Sipping beverage divine,
And pledg|ing with | content|ed smack
The Mer|maid in | the Zo|diac.[2]

The true iambic lines which close the paragraphs seem to bring in a note alien from the general character of the

[1] *Lines written among the Euganean Hills*, ll. 275 ff., *Poetical Works*, p. 553. [2] *Lines on the Mermaid Tavern*, ll. 13 ff., *Poems*, p. 202.

metre. Keats could write the pure iambic form of the measure, and did, with excellent smoothness and grace, in the unfinished *Eve of St. Mark*.

Scott, in some of his narrative poems, produced perhaps the plainest and purest form of the four-foot iambic couplet that is to be found. His lines are swift and vigorous in movement, but so plain as to be inclined to dulness. The modulations he uses are few, and nearly every line is end-stopped. He does not admit amphibrachs at the end, anapaests anywhere, nor trochees except in the first place. The usual run of the measure from his hands is much as follows:

> The Chief in silence strode before,
> And reach'd that torrent's sounding shore,
> Which, daughter of three mighty lakes,
> From Vennachar in silver breaks,
> Sweeps through the plain, and ceaseless mines
> On Bochastle the mouldering lines,
> Where Rome, the Empress of the world,
> Of yore her eagle wings unfurled.
> And here his course the Chieftain staid,
> Threw down his target and his plaid,
> And to the Lowland warrior said: [1]

The rhymes are single, full, and strong always, and forcing a pause, give the effect of endstopping even where the sense pause is hardly marked. A rare grace in such plain and workmanlike technique is the extension of couplet to triplet, as in the close of the passage quoted, or:

> And ne'er did Grecian chisel trace
> A Nymph, a Naiad, or a Grace
> Of finer form, or lovelier face! [2]

In Browning's *Christmas Eve and Easter Day*, the free and subtle measure of *Christabel* is reduced to mere doggerel. The technical licences are the same, except that overflow

[1] *The Lady of the Lake*, Canto V, XII, *Poetical Works*, p. 254.
[2] *The Lady of the Lake*, Canto I, XVIII, *Poetical Works*, p. 212.

is very rare, but the presiding instinct for form is lacking:

I | remembˇer, he | did say
× × × / / /
'Doubt|less that, | to this | world's end,
Where two or three should meet to pray,
He would be in the midst, their friend;
Certainly he was there with them!'
×
And | my pulses leaped for joy
× × /
Of the gold|en thought | without | alloy,
× × /
That I saw | his verˇ|y vestˇ|ure's hem.[1]

No poem shows better the resources of the four-foot couplet than Arnold's *Resignation*, in which it is used to give complete and harmonious expression to the most varied material, from the trivial

Our jovial host, as forth we fare,
Shouts greeting from his easy chair;[2]

to the confines of the sublime,

Though he move mountains; though his day
Be pass'd on the proud heights of sway;
Though he hath loos'd a thousand chains;
Though he hath borne immortal pains,[3]

from quiet description,

He leans upon a gate, and sees
The pastures, and the quiet trees.
Low woody hill, with gracious bound,
Folds the still valley almost round;[4]

to profound philosophy;

That general Life, which does not cease,
× / × × / /
Whose secˇ|ret is | not joy, | but peace;
. . . . . .
The Life of plants, and stones, and rain:
The Life he craves; if not in vain
Fate gave, what Chance shall not control,
His sad lucidity of soul.[5]

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[1] *Christmas Eve and Easter Day*, VIII, *Poetical Works*, Vol. I, p. 485.
[2] *Resignation*, *Poems*, p. 87.
[3] *Resignation*, *Poems*, p. 90.
[4] *Resignation*, *Poems*, p. 90.
[5] *Resignation*, *Poems*, p. 91.

Arnold's technique in this poem carries us back to the seventeenth century, and especially to Marvell, for he uses the complete form, with its slow, easy progress, the habitual end-pause, and the occasional rather self-conscious overflow. But in *Tristram and Iseult* he uses the free form of Coleridge, often with light openings:

Iseult | of Brit|tany ?— || but where→
Is | that other Iseult fair,
That proud, | first Is|eult, || Corn|wall's Queen ?
She, | whom Trist|ram's ship | of yore,
From I|reland | to Cornwall bore,
To | Tyntag|el, to | the side→
Of | King Marc, | to be | his bride ? [1]

William Morris took up the measure for several of the poems of *The Earthly Paradise*, and used it with some of the same restrictions as Scott. He does not admit anapaests or double endings. But he slows down the movement considerably with a weight of spondaic modulation, and, above all, he admits overflow to any extent, and breaks couplets or even lines by strong pauses, and so gives an impression of greater freedom and flexibility:

How might he tell if aught could move
Her grief|-chilled heart ? | yet love | slew fear,
Lulled speech | to sleep: | sweet to | be near;
Yea, even | if all | were changed, || if all→
Into | this dumb, | strange life | must fall,
If all | the long|ing and | the pain→
For signs | of love | were spent | in vain;
If, || in | strange wise | together brought,
They were apart | still, || and | still nought→

[1] *Tristram and Iseult*, Poems, p. 141.

Might tell of better hope! | Ó sweet→
Beyond all words, || there at her feet→
To lie and watch | her; || By | what word→
Might his | deep love | be bet|ter heard
Than by that silence? [1]

[1] *The Land East of the Sun, The Earthly Paradise*, Vol. V, p. 132.

CHAPTER III

THE FIVE-FOOT COUPLET

AN interesting contrast between four-foot and five-foot iambic verse is that among the varieties of the five-foot or heroic line, as it came to be called, particularly in its couplet form, there is nothing analogous to the continuous heptasyllable, with its wavering towards trochaic rhythm. The line of nine syllables, which corresponds in this metre to that of seven in the metre we have just been considering, is of the rarest possible occurrence. We find it occasionally in Chaucer:

Ging|len in | a whist|lynge wynd | als clere,[1]

Twent|y bok|es, clad | in blak | or reed,[2]

Marlowe admits it in his blank verse from time to time. So does Webster. But Shakespeare and Milton, and their followers in blank verse, and the later writers of the couplet avoid it. And it is quite impossible to imagine continuous heroic verse slipping over into the measure of:

Dante once prepared to paint an angel:[3]

We shall find our attention therefore spared for only two types of heroic couplet, the strict, which has the lines end-stopped and the couplets separate, and the free, which admits much modulation and overflow. Both varieties have their roots in the verse of Chaucer, by whom the

[1] *Prologue, Works*, Vol. IV, p. 6.
[2] *Prologue, Works*, Vol. IV, p. 9.
[3] Browning, *One Word More, Poetical Works*, Vol. I, p. 547.

measure was first consciously and deliberately used. Chaucer's early handling of the measure was according to the model of the French decasyllable, with a more or less marked pause after the second foot, obeying the law of the French caesura:

> He rent the sail, || with hokes lyke a sythe;
> He bringeth the cuppe, || and biddeth them be blythe;[1]

But Chaucer's instinct was for freedom, and this tendency was strengthened by his study of the Italian hendecasyllable, which he found a more congenial model, so that in his later verse we find him more inclined to overflow, and returning less to the stereotyped caesural pause, to which, even in his early work, he had not been slavishly constant:

> Fraunceys Petrark, the laureat poete,
> Highte | this clerk, | whos reth|oryk|e sweete→
> Enlumined al Itaille of poetrye,
> As Linian dide of philosophye→
> Or lawe, or other art particuler;
> But deeth, that wol nat suffre us dwellen heer
> But as it were a twinkling of an yë,
> Hem bothe hath slayn, and alle shul we dye.[2]

Chaucer's verse does not exclude trisyllabic feet, though he uses them sparingly:

> To Caunt|erbury | with ful | devout | corage,[3]
> He wayt|ed aft|er no pompe | and rev|erence,[4]

After Chaucer the metrical sense and the grasp of the principle of foot rhythm were never fully recaptured in England for several generations. Lydgate and Occleve wrote bad shambling heroics, while the Scottish poets of the fifteenth century, most of whom were much surer of ear, and could compose quite good decasyllables, did little in the couplet form.

[1] *The Legend of Good Women*, ll. 646–7, *Works*, Vol. III, p. 108.
[2] *Clerk's Prologue*, ll. 31 ff., *Works*, Vol. IV, p. 390.
[3] *Prologue*, l. 22, *Works*, Vol. IV, p. 1.
[4] *Prologue*, l. 525, Vol. IV, p. 16.

But in the early sixteenth century there was a revival of poetry, and not the least important of its aspects was the awakening of interest in new technical forms of verse. Soon the five-foot line was being developed in the sonnet and in blank verse, and the couplet was among the medley of forms which flourished in the drama.

Spenser uses it with admirable flexibility and ease, but rather a jog-trot motion in *Mother Hubberd's Tale*. He uses overflow, but very little modulation:

> Among the rest a good old woman was,
> Hight Moth|er *Hubb|erd* || who | did farre surpas→
> The rest in honest mirth, that seem'd her well:
> She when | her turne was come her tale to tell,
> Told of a strange aduenture, that betided
> Betwixt the Foxe and th' Ape by him misguided;
> The which for that my sense it greatly pleased,
> All were my spirite heauie and diseased,
> Ile write in termes, as she the same did say,
> So well as I her words remember may.[1]

Much more interesting metrically is the couplet measure of the May and September eclogues of *The Shepheardes Calender*. This seems to be in intention four-foot anapaestic, but it displays a constant tendency to slip over into unmistakable heroic metre, and contains many lines that may be read in either way. Very often a couplet consists of one line of each kind, like the last one below. On the whole this passage is more sustained in the heroic movement than is normal. Only the last line refuses the iambic scansion:

> But tract | of time, | and long | prosper|itie:
> That nource | of vice, | this of | insol|encie,
> Lulled the | shepheards | in such | secur|itie,
> That not | content | with loy|all ob|eysaunce,
> Some gan | to gape | for greed|ie gou|ernaunce,
> And match | them selfe | with might|y pot|entates,
> Louers of Lordship and troublers of states:[2]

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[1] *Mother Hubberd's Tale*, ll. 33 ff., *Poetical Works*, p. 495.
[2] *The Shepheardes Calender, May*, ll. 117 ff., *Poetical Works*, p. 437.

The first two lines quoted show the very beginning of the association between the formal rhythmic structure of the heroic couplet, written strictly as a pair of bisected lines, and those peculiarities of phrasing and sentiment which so distinguish the measure in its prime. This association received an impulse from outside the bounds of the continuous couplet. By the last quarter of the sixteenth century, the five-foot line was established in the sonnet and in numerous stanzas, which closed, as the English variety of the sonnet did, with a rhymed couplet. This pair of lines at the end of a group lent itself readily to epigrammatic turns of speech, to balance and antithesis, as it was used for clinching an argument or rounding off an image. A sonnet of Sidney's, for example, closes thus:

> Whose presence absence, absence presence is:
> Blest in my curse, and cursed in my blisse.[1]

And the stanzas of Fairfax's famous translation of Tasso provide innumerable examples of the endstopped antithetical couplet, which carry more than a suggestion of future developements:

> Thus women know, and thus they vse the guise
> T'enchant the valiant, and beguile the wise.[2]

In Drayton's hands the effect of such phenomena on the couplet is seen. There is the regular endstopping: the phrases are beginning to fall into balanced pairs, corresponding with the two sections of the line, which nearly always has a strong pause after the fourth, or, less often, after the fifth or sixth syllable. There is noticeable, too, that padding of disyllabic adjectives, which Saintsbury has remarked as being so frequent in Pope's couplet. Nearly every line contains some word which can be deleted, so as to change the passage into fluent octosyllabics:

[1] *Astrophel and Stella*, LX, *Arcadia*, 1593, *etc.*, p. 266.
[2] *Jerusalem Delivered*, Book IV, Stanza 85, p. 72.

Upon this Mount there stood a (stately) Groue
Whose (reaching) arms to clip the Welkin stroue,
Of (tufted) Cedars, and the branching Pine,
Whose (bushy) tops themselues doe so intwine,
As seem'd when Nature first this work begun
She then conspir'd against the (piercing) Sun : [1]

We find also such epigrammatic couplets as

Fatall my birth, vnfortunate my life,
Vnkinde my children, most vnkind my wife.[2]

As this formalism of construction became systematic, foot modulation decreased : the trisyllabic substitutions disappeared : pyrrhic and spondee were used sparingly, and the trochee relegated to an occasional appearance in the first place. By the end of the sixteenth century the final amphibrach was falling into disuse, though it had survived the disappearance of the final ' e ', and Spenser uses it with a closed syllable :

Whilome (said she) before the world | was ciuill
The Foxe and th'Ape disliking of | their euill [3]

But in the general curtailment of liberties it was trimmed away with the other trisyllabic feet.

The strictness had not yet, however, become a tyranny, and until far into the seventeenth century, poets could produce the free overflowing couplet as naturally and as well as the other. William Browne of Tavistock could do both and alternates them :

As when the gallant youth that liue vpon→
The Westerne Downes of louely *Albion* ;
Meeting, some festiuall to solemnise,
Choose out | two, || skill'd | in wrastling exercise,
Who strongly, at the wrist or coller cling
While arme in arme the people make a Ring.[4]

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[1] *Endimion and Phœbe*, p. 10.
[2] *England's Heroical Epistles, Henry to Rosamund, Poems* (1605), p. M 5 b.
[3] *Mother Hubberd's Tale*, ll. 46–7, *Poetical Works*, p. 495.
[4] *Britannia's Pastorals*, Book I, Song 5, p. 86.

Donne, who could be a smooth enough metrist when he liked, seems, in the couplet of his satires, to be not only perfectly unregulated, but purposely harsh and crabbed. He mingles all possible licences in their most exaggerated form, overflow, pause even within the last foot, trochee frequently in the last place, trisyllables everywhere. The result is a jarring negation of rhythm:

O desperate coward, wilt thou seeme | bold, || and→
To thy | foes and | his (who | made thee | to stand→
Senti|nell in | his worlds | garrison) | thus yeeld,
And for | forbidden | warres, leave | th'appoint|ed field?
Know thy | foes: | The foule | Devill | (whom thou→
Strivest | to please,) | for hate, | not love, | would allow→
Thee faine, | his whole | Real|me to | be quit;[1]

Most of the interminable romancers of the seventeenth century used the couplet. Some, as metrists, are simply dull, but others like Chamberlayne in *Pharonnida* are chaotic. Chamberlayne's formlessness is usually the result of undiscriminating overflow, and endless trailing sentences:

With tyrants more→
Indomitable, then the sea that bore→
Their black Fleet, leave our *Hero* to untie→
This knotty riddle of his fate, | whilst by→
The *ignis fatuus* of a fancie led
With slow pac'd feet, through other paths we tread.[2]

But Waller, to whom Dryden always acknowledged his chief debt, was at work in the second quarter of the century, elaborating the strict declamatory heroic. He inclines to the definite break at the half line, to endstopping, and to separation of the couplets:

[1] *Satyre III*, *Poems*, Vol. I, p. 155. The whole passage is so unrhythmical that any scansion can only be tentative.
[2] *Pharonnida*, Book III, Canto II, ll. 412 ff., p. 203.

Now shall the Ocean || as thy Thames bee free
From both those fates || of stormes and Piracy.
But wee most happy, || who can feare no force
But winged troopes || or *Pegasean* horse.[1]

But he is free from the mechanical effect which is the danger of the heroic couplet, and he may have taught Dryden to be master of his rules instead of being mastered by them, and particularly not to be afraid of overflow, when he has need of a long sonorous sweep of phrase:

Roaring she tears the ayr with such a noise—
(As well resembled the conspiring voice—
Of routed armies,)[2]

Dryden perfected Waller's mould for the production of rich and stately harmonies. He is master of the stiff, bisected line when he cares to use it:

Nothing to Build || and all things to Destroy.[3]

Who think too little, || and who talk too much.[4]

He is also prone to defer the break till the end of the third foot, which gives the lines an effect of greater power and vitality, as if the rhythmic impulse were not soon exhausted:

These out of meer instinct, || they knew not why,
Ador'd their fathers God, || and Property:[5]

Another way in which he avoids a tendency to a clipped and scrappy rhythmic effect is, while keeping the middle pause, to disregard the line and couplet breaks, and overrun from pause to pause:

Yet had she oft been chas'd with horns and hounds,—
And Scythian shafts; || and many winged wounds—
Aim'd at her heart;[6]

By varying the position of the pause he can obtain a variety of phrase-length seldom achieved in the strict heroic metre.

[1] *To the King on his Navy*, ll. 13 ff., *Poems, etc.*, p. 14.
[2] *The Battle of the Summer Islands*, Canto III, *Poems, etc.*, p. 106.
[3] *Absalom and Achitophel*, l. 532, p. 17.
[4] *Absalom and Achitophel*, l. 534, p. 17.
[5] *Absalom and Achitophel*, ll. 535–6, p. 17.
[6] *The Hind and the Panther*, ll. 5 ff., pp. 1–2.

He introduces also, for further relief, frequent triplets among his couplets, especially where phrasing and diction are at their most formal:

> All carry'd on: || all of a piece with theirs
> As free her Alms, || as diligent her cares;
>
> As loud her Prais|es, || and | as warm her Pray'rs.[1]

The triplet is often further elaborated by closing with a six-foot line, or Alexandrine:

> Still when the Giant-brood invades her Throne
> She stoops from Heav'n, and meets 'em half-way down,
>
> And with | patern|al Thund|er vin|dicates | her Crown.[2]

Less often the Alexandrine appears as the second line of a couplet. Dryden readmitted the double ending, but makes only occasional use of it:

> Where Sanhedrin and Priest inslav'd | the Nation,
>
> And justifi'd their Spoils by In|spiration: [3]

He keeps, as a rule, to the small allowance of disyllabic modulations that was stereotyped as early as Drayton.

Pope drew back at first from the freedom won by Dryden, gaining in finish, but losing in fire and resonance. He gave up even the mechanical liberties like the triplet and Alexandrine. He also returned for his most frequent break to the end of the second foot, and rigidly observed end-pause and separation of the couplets. In the descriptive parts we notice the tendency already shown by Drayton to fill out thin phrases by a mechanical weighting of disyllabic adjectives. Often there are two in a line, either of which may be removed to produce a good four-foot line:

> But (anxious) Cares the (pensive) Nymph oppprest,
> And (secret) Passions labour'd in her Breast.
> Not (youthful) Kings in Battel seaz'd (alive)
> Not (scornful) Virgins who their Charms survive,
> Not (ardent) Lovers robb'd of all their Bliss,
> Not (ancient) Ladies when refus'd a Kiss,[4]

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[1] *Eleanora*, p. 5. [2] *The Hind and the Panther*, II, ll. 535 ff., p. 62.
[3] *Absalom and Achitophel*, ll. 523–4, p. 17.
[4] *Rape of the Lock*, Canto IV, ll. 1 ff., p. 30.

His most frequent modulation is the pyrrhic, and a pyrrhic third foot, with the pause in the middle, so that the line is divided into two equal sections of five syllables and two stresses, became characteristic of him at his most sententious, though he probably caught the sound of it from Dryden:

> Plac'd on this Isth|mus × || of × | a Middle State,
> A Being darkly wise, || and rudely great:
>
> With too much Know|ledge × || for × | the Sceptic Side,
>
> With too much Weak|ness × || for × | a Stoic's Pride.[1]

Pope was the most self-conscious of artists, and his precepts enforced by his copious examples, gained such a hold over the literary world of his age, that a poet must write like him in order to succeed, and indeed, with the very definite and potent tune of the Popean couplet assailing his ear from all around, the most original would have found it hard to do otherwise. So it happened that for a generation after Pope's death, almost all verse not written in the couplet was composed in more or less conscious rebellion against his dictatorship, and all verse written in the couplet was written under his spell. Thus more than forty years after his death Cowper could write of him, in perfect imitation of his own metre:

> But he (his mus|ical × × | finesse was such,
> So nice his ear, so delicate his touch)
> Made poetry a mere mechanic art,
>
> And every warb|ler × \ has | his tune by heart.[2]

But Pope himself, when long practice had made him completely at home with the metre, adapted it to colloquial speech, and tempered it to a suppleness which was a lesson to some who afterwards wished to escape from his tyranny:

[1] *Essay on Man*, II, ll. 3 ff., p. B 1 a.
[2] *Table Talk*, ll. 652 ff., *Poems*, p. 104.

Shut, || shut | the door, || good *John* ! || fatigu'd I said,
Tye up the knocker, || say I'm sick, || I'm dead,
The Dog-star rages ! || nay 'tis past a doubt,
All *Bedlam*, || or *Parnassus*, || is let out:
Fire in their eye, and Papers in their hand,
They rave, recite, and madden round the land.[1]

But he keeps to his end pause.

Goldsmith followed Pope in technique, though he brought into his poetry fresh stuff of emotion and imagery which made the stereotyped, sententious couplet difficult. He has a peculiar fondness for the ionic a minore opening:

And the long grass | o'ertops the mouldering wall;[2]
And his best rich|es, ignorance of wealth.[3]

The frequency of such lines differentiates his rhythm from that of Pope, who seldom balances his frequent pyrrhics with spondees.

In the second half of the eighteenth century, most of the vital force of poetry was spent in the discovery of new modes. Among those who tried to bring fresh music out of the old instrument, and to break away from the tyranny of Pope, while expressing themselves in his form, were Cowper and Crabbe. In the midst of much that echoes Pope, Cowper has passages which show a feeling for the major rhythmic forms, built up of many lines and phrases, and an instinct for manipulating pauses so as to keep the voice in suspense until the close of a period. And the trochee after a pause has a note of novelty:

Ask not the boy, || who, || when | the breeze of morn→
First shakes the glittering drops from every thorn,
Unfolds his flock, then under bank or bush→
Sits linking cherry-stones, or platting rush,
How fair is freedom ?[4]

Crabbe, too, wrote much that is flat and humdrum, but he succeeded in adjusting the couplet for homely dia-

[1] *Epistle to Dr. Arbuthnot*, ll. 1 ff., p. 1.
[2] *The Deserted Village*, l. 48, *Poetical Works*, p. 24.
[3] *The Deserted Village*, l. 62, *Poetical Works*, p. 25.
[4] *Retirement*, ll. 395 ff., *Poems*, p. 207.

logue and vigorous speech, somewhat in Pope's latest manner:

> And when I die—What! can I this believe?
> Are these true tender tears and does my Kitty grieve?
> Ah! crafty vixen, thine old man has fears;
> But weep no more! I'm melted by thy tears;
> Spare but my money; thou shalt rule me still,
> And see thy cousins—there! I burn the will! —[1]

And in descriptive passages his metre often takes on a sudden and unexpected beauty and flexibility in a manner quite different from Pope's:

> High o'er the restless deep, above the reach
> Of gunner's hope, vast flocks of wild-ducks stretch;
> . . . . . .
> All in their wedge-like figures from the north,
> / × × / / × × /
> Day after day, flight after flight, go forth.
> In-shore their passage tribes of sea-gulls urge,
> And drop for prey within the sweeping surge;
> Oft in the rough opposing blast they fly→
> Far back, then turn, and all their force apply,
> While to | the storm | they give | their weak | complain|ing cry;
> Or clap the sleek white pinion to the breast,
> × × / × / × / × /
> And in the restless ocean || dip for rest.[2]

There is no suggestion of middle break; the pauses in the line are rare, and hardly ever in the middle. There is Dryden's triplet and Alexandrine, without any echo of his style; there is, in the last line, antithesis, which contrasts strongly, in verbal structure as in rhythm, with Pope's antitheses. And everywhere is shown, as in the overflow of line seven, and the double choriambus of line four, that sensitiveness of rhythm to the processes of the idea, which is the stamp of high poetic quality.

The chief pioneers of the Romantic Movement spared little labour for the couplet, but in the full tide of Romanticism, Keats turned to it again, with such complete disregard of the old technique that it is difficult to recognise in *Endymion* the trained and disciplined measure of the Augustans. With Keats, endstopping has ceased to be

[1] *The Parish Register*, II, *Poetical Works*, p. 62.
[2] *The Borough*, Letter I, *Poetical Works*, p. 112.

normal, and instead of keeping overflow as an expressive modulation, he sweeps on for line after line, often with magnificent energy, but in a breathless way which destroys all impression of form. For Keats has, in a marked degree, the power of suspending the rhythm, and not allowing the voice to drop finally on an intermediate pause:

For 'twas the morn: || Apollo's upward fire→
Made every eastern cloud a silvery pyre→
Of brightness so unsullied, || that therein→
A melancholy spirit well might win→
Oblivion, || and melt out its essence fine→
Into the winds: || rain-scented eglantine→
Gave temperate sweets to that well-wooing sun;
The lark was lost in him; || cold springs had run→
To warm their chilliest bubbles in the grass;
Man's voice was on the mountains; || and the mass→

Of nature's lives and wonders puls'd | tenfold,
To feel this sun-rise and its glories old.[1]

Whenever we would fain rest we are hurried along on the next wave of rhythm until the end. Occasionally the continuity of the base is shaken by the use of unusual feet, even near the ends of lines:

How trem|ulous-dazz|lingly | the wheels | sweep [2]

Obstin|ate sil|ence came | heavily | again.[3]

This is the Keats of *Endymion*. Before writing *Lamia* he had deeply studied Dryden's versification, and we find him taking up the couplet again with a finer sense of form, and a more sustained assurance of narrative technique:

Fair Hermes, crown'd with feathers, fluttering light,
I had a splendid dream of thee last night:
I saw thee sitting, on a throne of gold,
Among the Gods, || upon Olympus old,
The only sad one; || for thou didst not hear
The soft, lute-finger'd Muses chaunting clear,
Nor even Apollo when he sang alone,

Deaf to | his throb|bing throat's | long, long | melod|ious moan.[4]

[1] *Endymion*, I, 95 ff., *Poems*, p. 55.
[2] *Endymion*, II, 189, *Poems*, p. 79.
[3] *Endymion*, II, 335, *Poems*, p. 82.
[4] *Lamia*, I, 68 ff., *Poems*, p. 148.

The influence of Dryden is seen in the return to endstopping, the frequent middle pauses, and the Alexandrine which closes the period. But Keats remains himself in his wise rejection of lifeless formalities.

In the midst of the freedom and independence of Romanticism, Byron chose at first to be an imitator, and although he fell into the utmost looseness later, in the couplet as well as in other measures, in *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, he caught Pope's metrical note, as he caught his idiom :

> There be who say, in these enlightened days,
> That splendid lies are all the poet's praise ;
> That strain'd invention, ever on the wing,
> Alone impels the modern bard to sing :
> 'Tis true, that all who rhyme,—nay, all who write,
> Shrink from that fatal word to genius,—trite !
> Yet Truth sometimes will lend her noblest fires,
> And decorate the verse herself inspires : [1]

Blank verse had by this time been firmly re-established on the throne of poetry, where it reigned throughout the nineteenth century, and the couplet held a subordinate though by no means obscure place among the metres. Tennyson and Browning chose blank verse for their most important poems, and made very little use of the heroic couplet. Tennyson, indeed, has no complete poem in the metre. *A Vision of Sin* opens with a brief passage of rather trite, rapid couplets, rigidly endstopped, and modulated only with a few pyrrhics, and the metre recurs in passages of commentary or interpretation throughout the dream. The metrical interest, however, lies in the easy transition, from the opening passage, which ends formally with a triplet and Alexandrine, to a passage of five-foot trochaic verses, a transition which, as has already been mentioned, is very rare :

> Dreams over lake and lawn, and isles and capes—
> Suffused them, sitting, lying, languid shapes,
> By heaps of gourds, and skins of wine, and piles of grapes,
> . . . . . .

[1] *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*, ll. 849 ff., *Poetical Works*, p. 121.

Then methought I heard a hollow sound,
Gathering up from all the lower ground;
Narrowing in to where they sat assembled
Low voluptuous music winding trembled,[1]

The metre, however, soon changes to the common blend of four-foot trochaic and 'sevens'.

Browning used the couplet for *Sordello* and for some of the *Parleyings*. The salient note of his handling is, of course, the utmost allowance of overflow, and the movement of his lines is at once free and cumbrous, as of a panoplied giant, partly owing to numerous pauses within the feet, the effect being weighty out of all proportion to the moderate allowance of spondees:

No niche
Where glory was not prisoned to enrich→

Man's gaze | with gold and gems, | no space | but glowed→
With col|our, || gleamed | with carving—|hues which owed→
Their outburst to a brush the painter fed→

With rainbow-sub|stance—|rare | shapes nev|er wed

To actual flesh and blood, which brain-|born once
Became the sculptor's dow|ry, || Art's | response
To earth's despair.[2]

Browning does not hesitate to delay the expected rhyme and mingle quatrains and other arrangements with his couplets.

The heroic couplet has the chief place among the metres of Arnold's *Tristram and Iseult*, and is used with an exceedingly fluent sweetness in the third section, *Iseult of Brittany*. But Arnold's chief originality lies in his use of the metre for many of the hectic, broken utterances of the dying knight:

'Up, Tristram, up' men cry, 'thou moonstuck knight!

What foul | fiend rides | thee? || On | into | the fight!'—
Above the din her voice is in my ears—
I see | her form | glide through | the crossing spears.—[3]

[1] *The Vision of Sin*, *Works*, p. 120.
[2] *Parleyings with Certain People*, *Christopher Smart*, *Poetical Works*, Vol. II, p. 701.
[3] *Tristram and Iseult*, *I. Tristram*, *Poems*, p. 146.

William Morris was almost the only major poet of the nineteenth century who used rhyme in preference to blank verse for long poems, and he wrote several of the books of *The Earthly Paradise* in the heroic couplet. In his hands it is marked by complete freedom from the effect of artifice, and by a generous display of the disyllabic modulations, but at the same time by certain wise restraints. Overflow is never overworked, though there is no obvious effort to avoid it, and there is a good deal of balance in the arrangement of feet; trisyllabic feet are not found:

> Now when we entered from the outer light
> And all the scents of the fresh day were past,
> With its sweet breezes, a dull shade seemed cast→
> Over our joy: what then? not if we would
> Could we turn back; and surely all was good.[1]

The distinctions between the strict and the free form of the five-foot are noticeably different from those between the two forms of the four-foot. With the latter the chief mark of the free form is the frequency of anapaestic substitution; with the former almost all depends on the formalization, or otherwise, of pause. Swinburne alone of writers of the free heroic couplet makes much and effective use of trisyllabic feet. With others their admission seems to be destructive of the metre. To his use of anapaests and numerous uncompensated spondees, and partly also to the accumulation of consonants in his rich luxuriant diction, is due the unmistakable effect of Swinburne's heroic lines. They move heavily, with a burdened and muffled tread, which can hardly be other than endstopped:

> Fate, ‖ that | was born | ere spirit | and flesh were made,
> The fire that fills | man's life | with light and shade;
> The power | beyond | all god|head which | puts on→
> All forms | of mult|itud|inous un|ison,

[1] *Earthly Paradise*, Vol. I, p. 79.

A rai|ment of | eternal change | inwrought
With shapes and hues more subtly spun than thought,
Where all | things old | bear fruit | of all | things new
And one | deep chord | throbs all | the music through,
The chord of change unchanging, shad|ow and light
Insep|arable as | reverb|erate day | from night.[1]

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[1] *Tristram of Lyonesse, The Sailing of the Swan*, ll. 1 ff., *Poems*, Vol. IV, p. 133.

CHAPTER IV

BLANK VERSE FROM THE BEGINNINGS TO THE RESTORATION

DESTINED to become the greatest of English measures, and to take its place with the supreme poetic forms of the world, blank verse was the latest of the great and common types to appear in our literature.

In 1557 there was published a translation by Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, of two books of the *Aeneid* in unrhymed lines of ten syllables, which were an attempt to reproduce in English the eleven-syllabled blank verse which the translator had found already established in Italian. The five-foot line was already known in the work of Chaucer and his imitators, and the abandonment of rhyme may well have been suggested by the renewal of the authority of Greek and Latin verse which was one of the achievements of the Renaissance. The new measure was soon taken over for the drama, by Sackville and Norton in *Gorboduc*, and by Gascoigne and other writers of tragedy on classical models. Thus it passed into the Elizabethan drama, which absorbed so much of the literary activity of the late sixteenth century, and the history of blank verse becomes part of the history of the drama. Growing in power and variety with the pre-Shakespearean group, particularly with Marlowe and Peele, it was crowned by Shakespeare, and afterwards shared in the decline of the drama, till it was superseded in tragedy for a time by the couplet, and in comedy by the glittering prose of the Restoration. But

before this, Milton had rescued the measure from the wrecks of the Jacobean drama, and launched it forth upon a new career of even wider scope, unbelievably enriched, and endowed with new technical resources.

As might be expected of a poet relinquishing for the first time the discipline of rhyme, Surrey feels it necessary to fortify the line limit by a regular pause at the end of each line. His verses are seldom better than a string of exactly similar rhythmic phrases, for there is hardly ever a pause within the line:

Who can expresse the slaughter of that night?
Or tell the nomber of the corpses slaine?
Or can in teres bewaile them worthely?
The auncient famous citie falleth down,
That many yeres did hold such seignorie,
With senslesse bodies euery strete is spred,
Eche pal|ace, and | sacred | porch of | the Gods.[1]

The lines are obviously built up carefully by counting the syllables, instead of satisfying the ear with the equivalent of five iambic feet. The result is seen in the last line, where the intrusion of two consecutive trochees after a pyrrhic, sets the movement of the line awry. But occasionally this pioneer, by happy accident, uses the trochee, which is almost his only modulation, with beauty and fitness which hold promise for the future:

The clam|or strake | up to | the gold|en sterres.[2]

In passages where there is grammatical overflow, or more truly where there is a less distinct pause than usual at the end of the line, the rhythm is no less elementary. The

[1] *Aeneid*, Book II, p. B 3 b.
[2] *Aeneid*, Book II, p. C 1 b.

secret of verbal manipulation which carries the voice over the base-pause has not been discovered:

> He brake the barres, and through the timber pearst→
> So large a hole, whereby they might discerne
> The house, the court, and secret chambers eke
> Of Priamus, and auncient Kings of Troy.[1]

Gorboduc (1561) shews little advance in blank verse from the point of view of expressiveness. But in construction an important step has been taken. The line is now obviously built by ear, on a five-foot basis. Modulations are therefore very few, but where they do occur, are sound. Endstopping and uniformity of rhythm are as before, and the whole effect, if steady and dignified, is seldom anything but dull:

> Ah noble prince, how oft haue I behelde→
> Thee mounted on thy fierce and traumpling stede,
> Shining |in arm|our bright | before | the tilt,
> And with | thy mis|tresse sleue | tied on | thy helme,
> And charge | thy staffe | to please | thy lad | ies eye,
> That bowed | the head | peece of | thy frend|ly foe?
> How oft | in armes | on horse | to bend | the mace?
> How oft | in armes | on foote | to breake | the sworde,
> Which neu|er now | these eyes | may see | againe.[2]

George Peele, who used blank verse in his dramas only as one among many metres, shews a far greater command of the instrument. At his best, as in the oration of Paris before the gods in *The Arraygnement of Paris* (1584), he shews real mastery of pause, and achieves rhythmic as well as grammatical overflow:

[1] *Aeneid*, Book II, p. C 1 b.
[2] *Ferrex and Porrex* (? 1571 edn.), Act IV., Sc. ii, pp. F 4 a and b.

Sacred and iust || thou great and dreadfull *Ioue*, ||
And you thrise reuerende powers, || whom loue nor hate,→
May wrest awry, || if this to me a man,||
This fortune fatall bee, || that I must pleade,
For safe excusall of my giltles thought,
The honour more makes my mishap the lesse.[1]

The pause after the short opening phrase, and the gradual extension of the groups [2] leading up to the long phrase which states the theme of the discourse, are masterly.

Marlowe as a rule has less variety and flexibility than Peele in his plainer dialogue. He returns to the end-stopped pauseless line, whose humdrum rhythm depreciates great splendour of diction:

Our soules, whose faculties can comprehend
The wond|rous Arch|itect|ure of | the world:
(And meas|ure eu|ery wand|ring plan|nets course,)
(Still clim|ing aft|er know|ledge in|finite,)
(And al|waies moou|ing as | the rest|les Spheares,)
Wils vs | to weare | our selues | and neu|er rest,
Untill | we reach | the rip|est fruit | of all.
(That per|fect blisse | and sole | felicitie.)
The sweet | fruit|ion of | an earth|ly crowne.[3]

[1] *The Arraygnement of Paris*, Act IV, Sc. iv, p. D 3 a.

[2] As often happens in early Elizabethan printing, the punctuation does not represent the natural movement of speech. A comma was not infrequently put at the end of a line which had no natural stop, apparently to suggest an artificial pause. Some readers must therefore have thus ignored the sense. This convention, though it gradually died out where dramatic blank verse was concerned, lingered on from the still earlier custom, when all verse was end-stopped, of not putting punctuation signs at the line-endings. Readers knew that the sense would stop automatically at the end. When punctuation marks became more popular with printers the printers themselves could not grow out of the habit of regarding all verse as endstopped sufficiently quickly to realize that dramatic verse had broken a long tradition.

[3] *Tamburlaine*, Act II, Sc. vi, C 1 b.

Any or all of the lines bracketed can be left out without loss, from the point of view of grammar, and their omission makes no gap in the metrical construction of the passage, which could never be if the verse were living. But through such plain workmanship, and through extensive practice in fitting a rich and glowing diction rigidly to the base, Marlowe was preparing his blank verse technique to stand the severest test yet put upon the metre. When he pours into the mould of five-foot verse torrents of passionate eloquence from the agony of a soul confronted with damnation, and the mould is tempered to sustain it, we forget to scan, think as little as probably Marlowe did about modulations, and know only that we are listening to supreme poetry:

Ah Faustus,
Now | hast thou | but one bare hower | to liue,
And then | thou must | be damnd | perpet|ually:
Stand stil | you eu|er moou|ing spheres | of heauen,
That time | may cease, || and mid|night neu|er come:
Fair Nat|ures eie, | rise, rise | againe, | and make
Perpet|uall day, | or let | this houre | be but
A yeere, | a moneth, | a weeke, | a nat|urall day,
That Faust|us may | repent, | and saue|his soule,
O lente lente cur[r]ite noctis equi:
The starres | mooue stil, | time runs, | the clocke | wil strike,
The diu|el wil come, | and Faust|us must | be damnd.
O Ile | leape up | to my God: | who pulles | me downe?

See see | where Christs | blood streames | in the firm|ament,
One drop | would saue | my soule, | half a | drop, ah | my Christ,
Ah rend | not my heart | for nam|ing of | my Christ,
Yet wil | I call | on him, | oh spare | me Luc|ifer!

Where is | it now ? | tis gone ; | and see | where God
Stretcheth out | his arme, | and bends | his ire|full browes :
Mountaines | and hilles, | come come, | and fall | on me,
And hide | me from | the heau|y wrath | of God.[1]

It is hard to bring ourselves to the counting of syllables in this, but not altogether unprofitable if we can do so. We see the beginning of expressive trisyllabic substitution (ll. 3, 8, 12), and especially in the cretic which so marvellously brings the note of dread into line 19. Everywhere we see the mastery of pause, though there is so little overflow. A most remarkable feature is the prevalence not only of lines composed entirely of monosyllables, like line 11, which ticks off slow horrors, clocklike, in its unhastening, unhesitating march, but of lines where all the words but one are monosyllables, and the one longer word thus gathers striking significance (ll. 3, 7, 14, 21, and others). The tenseness of mental agony reaches its climax in a six-foot line (15). Even the bold change to a classical rhythm in the Latin line is effective. Marlowe dares not seldom a line opening with a monosyllabic foot, like line 2 in the above passage, a habit which Shakespeare soon discarded :

High|ly scorn|ing, that | the low|ly earth
Should drinke his bloud.[2]

There is a speech in *Tamburlaine* which contains three such lines among eleven :

Bar|barous and bloody Tamburlaine, . . .
Treach|erous and false Theridamas, . . .
Blood|y and insatiate Tamburlain ![3]

---

[1] *Dr. Faustus*, pp. F 2 a and b. Line lengths normalized in two places.
[2] *Edward II*, ll. 2124–5, p. I 2 b.
[3] *Tamburlaine*, Act II, Sc. vi, pp. C 1 a and b.

Shakespeare did not achieve perfection in a single leap, but he soon learnt all that his predecessors had to teach. He began where Marlowe began, with the mainly end-stopped, rigid form, which Marlowe, in his short literary life, hardly outgrew, the type which is apt to be declamatory, and is with difficulty made to sound like natural speech. There is a good deal of this less accomplished kind in *Romeo and Juliet*, the earliest of the tragedies, and among the earliest group of plays, dated not later than 1596:

If I | may trust | the flat|tering truth | of sleep
My dreams | presage | some joy|ful news | at hand:
My bos|om's lord | sits light|ly on | his throne,
And all | this day | an un|accust|om'd spirit
Lifts me | above | the ground | with cheer|ful thoughts.[1]

But already we are aware of something new in technique, an infinitely more delicate touch upon the common keys, and a surprising variety of *shape* in the rhythmic construction of the lines. In the same play Shakespeare reaches almost to perfection in the more elaborate harmonies of the overflowing type, though still with a good deal of end-stopping:

Ah dear Juliet
Why art | thou yet | so fair? | Shall I believe→
That un|substan|tial Death | is am|orous,
And that | the lean | abhorr|ed mon|ster keeps→
Thee here | in dark | to be | his par|amour?
For fear | of that | I still | will stay | with thee,
And nev|er from | this pa|lace of | dim night→
Depart | again: || here, here | will I | remain→
With worms | that are | thy cham|bermaids; || O here→
Will I | set up | my ev|erlast|ing rest,
And shake | the yoke | of in|auspic|ious stars→
From this | world-wear|ied flesh.[2]

[1] *Romeo and Juliet*, V, i, 1–5.
[2] *Romeo and Juliet*, V, iii, 101 ff.

The genius is shown in the crossing of the foot-rhythm by the word-rhythm of the long sonorous 'unsubstantial', 'inauspicious', 'everlasting', but a genius who was already a master would not have built two consecutive lines with the double-trochaic word occupying the same place in a line of monosyllables. The magic is wrought almost entirely by deft handling of pause. The modulations are all disyllabic, and are not many, but every spondee is plainly intentional, and there is delicate *shading* in the arrangement of stresses and half-stresses.

There is traceable, but space forbids its being traced here, a steady advance through experiment towards full accomplishment in the decade following the publication of *Romeo and Juliet*, and a technique is evolved capable equally of embodying the richest fruits of human experience and imagination, and of carrying through the plain prose business of everyday. The genius is shown perhaps most in this plainer verse, for Shakespeare never overloads his technique; it is always simply adequate. Though he does not dispense with prose, he gives us in verse much that might well be thought the legitimate business of prose:

Third Gent. The ship | is here | put in,
A Ver|ones|a; ‖ Mic|hael Cas|sio,
Lieuten|ant to | the war|like Moor, | Othello,
Is come | on shore: | the Moor | himself's | at sea,
And is | in full | commis|sion here | for Cyprus.
Montano. I am glad | on't; 'tis | a worth|y gov|ernor.
Third Gent. But this | same Cas|sio, though | he speak | of comfort→
Touching | the Turk|ish loss, | yet he | looks sadly
And prays | the Moor | be safe; | for they | were parted→
With foul | and vi|olent temp|est,[1]

Prose could not have more clarity, nor do plain work better, and yet we have the distinction and vitality of verse.

The blank verse is at its greatest in the tragedies of the

[1] *Othello*, II, i, 25 ff

zenith, for there the highest demands are made on it. But we see its greatness not always most clearly in the finest and most quoted passages, partly because our attention is there wholly absorbed by the thought, emotion, or imagery, and only the most striking abnormalities of technique will force themselves on our attention in such circumstances, while its subtleties pass unnoticed. There is the utmost rhythmic delicacy, for instance, in the following speech of Banquo, which begins in short broken phrases, with disregard of the end pause, which fitly reflect undirected meditation over past events, and gradually glides into the more rhetorical, stopped mode, as calculation enters into Banquo's mind and takes possession of his thoughts:

Thou hast it now, || King, || Cawdor, || Glamis, || all,→
As the weird women promis'd; || and, I fear,→
Thou play'dst | most foul|ly for't; | yet it was said,→
It should | not stand | in thy | poster|ity;
But that | myself | should be | the root | and father
Of man|y Kings. | If there | come truth | from them
(As upon thee, | Macbeth, | their speech|es shine)
Why, || by | the ver|ities | on thee | made good,
May they | not be | my or|acles | as well,
And set me up in hope? [1]

The modulations are of the simplest, disyllabic still, except for one final amphibrach in line 5. It is noticeable how, by an opening pyrrhic in lines 5 and 7, and by the two pyrrhics in line 4, the emphasis is made to fall on the important word, and how the declamatory phrase is ushered in by the apostrophe, 'Macbeth'.

Equally unobtrusive is the skill of these lines from *Antony and Cleopatra*:

[1] *Macbeth*, III, i. 1–10.

/ × × / / / × × × / ×
Nay, ‖ pray you, ‖ seek | no col|our for | your going,
/ × / / ×
But bid | farewell, | and go : | when you sued staying,
/ × × /
Then was | the time | for words : | no go|ing then ;
× × × \ × / × /
Eter|nity | was in | our lips | and eyes,
/ × × / / / × / / /
Bliss in | our brows' | bent ; ‖ none | our parts so poor,
× × × / × / (×) × / × /
But was a race of heaven : they are so still,
× ×
Or thou, | the great|est sold|ier of | the world,
Art turn'd | the great|est liar.[1]

The secret of this must lie in the rhythmic perfection, for the words are of the commonest and do not go beyond the vocabulary of prose, save for 'eternity' and 'bliss', and the syntax is simple almost to baldness. Only metrical form could so charge plain speech with the intense emotional impression of pain, passion, and scorn that the lines hold. Again there seems to be more in pause-modulation than in foot-substitution, though hardly a modulation occurs without the purpose of bringing special emphasis on the word which it affects ; in line 4 the only full stresses fall on the nouns ; even the common opening trochees are there with such justification. The pauses which break into the feet in lines 1 and 5 seem especially effective. But most important of all is the rhythmic *articulation* of the whole paragraph. Each phrase is complete, and yet related to the whole ; each, whether it ends with the line, or in the middle of the line, rounds off its own cadence, and yet holds the voice suspended until the last. The means by which this effect is obtained are incalculable.

Incidentally it is interesting to note that two consecutive lines, 1 and 2, have the amphibrachic ending. This is a mark of the development of Shakespeare's technique towards its final stage, in which trisyllabic feet of several kinds, including the final amphibrach, combine with much overflow to bring new graces to his own poetry, and to prepare a snare for those who followed him. A brief

[1] *Antony and Cleopatra*, I, iii, 32 ff.

quotation will give examples of the anapaest, the much heavier amphibrach, and of overflow from a pause before the last syllable in the line, and that a light one, which is a perilous practice :

More wom|anly | than he : | hardly | gave aud|ience, || or
Vouchsafed | to think | he had part|ners ; you | shall find there.[1]

This latest and least constrained kind of blank verse is seen at its height in *The Tempest* (*c.* 1611) :

Hast thou, || which art but air, || a touch, || a feeling→
Of their | afflict|ions, || and | shall not | myself,
One of | their kind, | that re|lish all | as sharply,→
Passion | as they, | be kind|lier moved | than thou art ?
Though with | their high | wrongs I | am struck | to the quick,
Yet with | my nob|ler reas|on 'gainst | my fury→
Do I | take part : | the rar|er act|ion is→
In virt|ue than | in veng|eance : they | being penitent,
The sole | drift of | my pur|pose doth | extend→
Not a | frown furth|er.[2]

We notice the frequent double endings, the two extra light syllables in line 8, the overflow from a pyrrhic last foot in line 7, all instances of a more advanced technique. The dominance of the double ending is shown in line 4, where the last light syllable is superfluous to the meaning ; the younger Shakespeare would probably have written

Be kindlier moved than thou,

---

[1] *Antony and Cleopatra*, I, iv, 7–8. This is more scannable than the folio reading—

More womanly than he. Hardly gave audience
Or vouchsafe to thinke he had Partners. You
Shall find there.

[2] *The Tempest*, V, i, 21–30.

but with the dying cadence of the double ending always in his ear he naturally adds another word. Pause before the last syllable is becoming frequent:

She→
Is daughter to this famous Duke of Milan.[1]

but→
With colours fairer painted their foul ends.[2]

In *The Winter's Tale*, which is technically if not chronologically the last of Shakespeare, overflow is much more common than endstopping:

Swear his thought over→
By each | partic|ular star | in Heav|en and→
By all | their in|fluences, | you may | as well→
Forbid | the sea | for to | obey | the moon,
As or | by oath | remove | or coun|sel shake→
The fab|ric of | his fol|ly, whose | foundation→
Is piled | upon | his faith, | and will | continue→
The stand|ing of | his body.[3]

But Shakespeare does not often, as in the last two lines, combine overflow with double ending, which was one of the weakening processes of the poets who came after him. He does, however, often write lines which end with a pyrrhic and overflow, where the line-ends break into groups of very closely related words:

but I am sure 'tis saf|er to→
Avoid what's grown than question how 'tis born[4]

Freed and enfranchised; not a par|ty to→
The anger of the King, nor guil|ty of,
If any be, the trespass of the queen.[5]

Such, as we shall see, are the seeds of corruption.

[1] *The Tempest*, V, i, 191–2.
[2] *The Tempest*, I, ii, 142–3.
[3] *The Winter's Tale*, I, ii, 424 ff.
[4] *The Winter's Tale*, I, ii, 432–3.
[5] *The Winter's Tale*, II, ii, 61 ff.

If we now turn to a brief cataloguing of foot-modulations, it must not be allowed to obscure the prevailing normality, in this respect, of Shakespeare's blank verse. The common disyllabic substitutions, and not too many of them, supply by far the greater part of his metrical resource, especially in the early part of his career, and his secret lies in handling them with a skill too minute to be captured by our notation.

The more extravagant modulations will be found mainly in passages where language and metre are alike overpowered by violent feeling. Of the common use of the trochee, spondee, and pyrrhic, almost any page will provide abundant examples. In the early plays there is not much of the final pyrrhic, as we have noticed, but this becomes frequent towards the end. The trochee, as always in the five-foot line, is common in the first, frequent in the third and fourth places, but hardly ever found in the second and last. An instance from *Antony and Cleopatra* will show its very marked effect in the second place:

/ ×
Thou should'st come like a Fury, crown'd with snakes.[1]

Anapaests become increasingly common in the later plays, and are found with almost equal frequency in all five places. They are nearly always of the light kind, occasioned by words whose vowels are susceptible by one or other of the rules of early printers or prosodists, of compression or elision.

/ (×) × × / (×) × / × (×) / × /
Given to | captiv|ity me | and my ut|most hopes.[2]

Occasionally there are heavier trisyllabic feet, which may possibly be scanned as anapaests, but are very near to cretic or antibacchius. In the case of the antibacchius, the initial syllable is the one likely to be suppressed, so that the foot has more the effect of a spondee than an anapaest:

/ × / / × × / ×
Bring me word | how tall | she is. | Pity | me Charmian[3]

---

[1] *Antony and Cleopatra*, II, v, 40. [2] *Othello*, IV, ii, 52.
[3] *Antony and Cleopatra*, II, v, 118 ff.

Be subject
(×) / / × / × /
To no sight | but thine | and mine ; invisible
To every eyeball else [1]

These modulations, it will be noticed, are in the first foot, where freedom of any kind is never so remarkable as elsewhere. Tribrachs are extremely rare in Shakespeare :

(×)×(×) ×
'T would make | her aim|iable and | subdue | my father [2]

Quadrisyllabic feet are to be found, and are quite frequent in *Othello* and *King Lear* :

(×) × × /
To wage | against | mine en|emies, nor fear | to lose it [3]

× (×) × / × /
For nought | but prov|ender, || and when | he's old, | cashier'd [4]

Each of these lines has a strong pause in the middle of the long foot, and another way of dealing with them is to scan them as six-foot lines, with a pyrrhic before the pause, or, in some cases, to allow the internal amphibrach. One line from *King Lear* would, according to this scansion, have two pyrrhic feet, or a pyrrhic and a half-stressed iambus :

× × × \ ×
Age is | unnec|essar|y : on | my knees | I beg. [5]

But these lines have hardly the same effect as the full six-foot lines which do occur from time to time.

The amphibrach in the fifth place, denoting what is commonly called the double or feminine ending, is one of the most important phenomena in the history of blank verse. We have already noticed its increasing frequency in the successive stages of Shakespeare's technique. Unless the

[1] *The Tempest*, I, ii, 301–2. Again the folio reading is obviously not Shakespeare's blank verse :

Be subject to no sight but thine and mine : invisible
To every eyeball else.

[2] *Othello*, III, iv, 59.
[3] *King Lear*, I, i, 156.
[4] *Othello*, I, i, 48.
[5] *King Lear*, II, iv, 157.

last syllable is a long one it falls so naturally on the ear that the effect is hardly noticeable :

I come | to bur|y Caes|ar, not | to praise him.[1]

That death | and nat|ure do | contend | about them.[2]

Two light syllables may be added to the last foot, making it a second paeon, and giving the line what might be called a triple ending. This generally happens when a proper noun ends the line, such words being traditionally capable of causing licence in metre :

Where Nat|ure doth | with mer|it chal|lenge. Goneril
Our eldest-born, speak first.[3]

That it | intends | to do ? | My Lord | of Burgundy.[4]

The mo|ment is | thy death. | Away ! | By Jupiter.[5]

But there are instances without the proper noun :

Upon | our king|dom : if | on the tenth | day following.[6]

And ob|servat|ion strange, | my mean|er ministers.[7]

Again the Alexandrine offers a way of escape for those who prefer it. Most of these quadrisyllabic feet, however, are from *King Lear*, a play in which blank verse and prose are bewilderingly mingled, and where the verse is very loosely constructed.

Though a full anapaest is extremely rare in Shakespeare, the internal amphibrach, creating a rhythm which in modern verse might be scanned with an anapaest, is fairly common :

What hath | quench'd them | hath given | me fire. | Hark ! Peace ![8]

might now appear more naturally :

What hath | quench'd them | hath giv|en me fire |

---

[1] *Julius Caesar*, III, ii, 82.
[2] *Macbeth*, II, ii, 7.
[3] *King Lear*, I, i, 53–4.
[4] *King Lear*, I, i, 238.
[5] *King Lear*, I, i, 179.
[6] *King Lear*, I, i, 177.
[7] *The Tempest*, III, iii, 87.
[8] *Macbeth*, II, ii, 2.

This is commonest before a pause:

Wake Dun|can with | thy knócking: || I would | thou couldst[1]

and especially when a line is divided between two speakers:

Miranda. . . . I have bróke | your hest | to say so |

Ferdinand. Admíred | Miránda[2]

In the following lines we have examples of both occasions:

Macbeth. Look on't again | I dare not. |

Lady Macbeth. | Infírm | of púrpose!

Give me | the daggers. || The sleep|ing and | the dead
Are but as pictures; 'tis the eye of childhood

That fears | a paint|ed devil. | If he | do bleed[3]

But there are of course many cases of a line thus shared between two speakers where the first speech ends on what might be an amphibrach, but the second begins not with a complete foot, but with a heavy syllable, so that the final syllable of the first speech is needed to complete the foot:

Ferdinand. . . . your father's in some passion

That works | him strong|ly.

Miranda. Nev|er till | this day . . .[4]

Where an internal amphibrach ending a speech is followed by a modulated foot, trochee or spondee, the line seems overweighted, and the base is difficult to hold:

Pompey. Whiles we are suitors to their throne, decays
The thing | we sue for. |

Menecrates. | We, ig|norant of | ourselves
Beg often our own harms.[5]

---

[1] *Macbeth*, II, ii, 73. [2] *The Tempest*, III, i, 37.
[3] *Macbeth*, II, ii, 51 ff. [4] *The Tempest*, IV, i, 144.
[5] *Antony and Cleopatra*, II, i, 4–6. This is printed as prose in the folio, but is too good verse to have been written as prose.

Marlowe's favoured opening with a monosyllabic foot is not found to nearly the same extent in Shakespeare, though it is found even in combination with the double ending:

Then | the whin|ing school|boy, with | his satchel [1]

This | is strange: || your fath|er's in | some passion.[2]

In the second case the pause keeps the movement iambic, but the first line moves uneasily among the normal iambics, and as the double ending became common, the monosyllabic opening fell into disuse. When Shakespeare uses it he often seems to do so with special intention. Thus, we find it in broken colloquial speech, where it gives a conversational effect:

Duncan. Who | comes here? |
Malcolm. The worth|y thane | of Rosse.[3]

or in the language of strong emotion, as when Prospero, breaking silence at last to his daughter concerning his wrongs, begins:

Twelve | year since, | Miran|da, twelve | year since.[4]

This seems more reasonable than the possible

Twelve ye|ar since, | Mirand|a, twelve | year since,

though instances of a word pronounced differently on two appearances do occur. A monosyllabic foot within the line is sometimes found in the same kind of emotional speech:

Blow, winds, | and crack | your cheeks! | rage! | blow! [5]

Mention has been made of the occasional six-foot lines with which Shakespeare's metre is diversified. They are not always harmonious or obviously intended for any

[1] *As You Like It*, II, vii, 145. [2] *The Tempest*, IV, i, 143.
[3] *Macbeth*, I, ii, 46. [4] *The Tempest*, I, ii, 53.
[5] *King Lear*, III, ii, 1.

effect, though the Alexandrine is capable of sententious use, as in Goneril's

Sir I | do love | you more | than world's | can wield | the matter[1]

But the Alexandrine is commonest in *King Lear*, where the execution of the blank verse is unusually rough.

Much more fraught with possibilities for music is the half-Alexandrine, or three-foot line, which represents the heptasyllable used for variety among Italian hendecasyllables. It always mingles well with the longer lines, and is an especial relief when the lines are endstopped:

> Hark, hark! one knocks. Portia, go in awhile;
> And by and by thy bosom shall partake
> The se|crets of | my heart.
> All my engagements will I construe to thee,
> All the charactery of my sad brows.[2]

It is particularly effective and very common at the close of a paragraph or speech:

> Know, Caesar doth not wrong, nor without cause
> Will he | be sat|isfied.[3]

The effect, however, is very little different if the next speaker completes the line with the remaining two feet, instead of beginning a new line; we have the effect of a three-foot line all the same; and probably Shakespeare, who knew its capabilities, would have made more use of the three-foot, had it not been that in drama, where the lines are often necessarily divided, the relief and variety which it affords are obtained naturally without it.

It is not possible to trace at all completely in chronological sequence the history of blank verse through the work of Shakespeare's contemporaries, and after him, until the closing of the theatres in 1642. The mass of dramatic literature which the period produced is immense, and we

[1] *King Lear*, I, i, 55. Folio omits 'do', which would make the line open with a monosyllabic foot, and move in trochaic rhythm.

[2] *Julius Caesar*, II, i, 304 ff. [3] *Julius Caesar*, III, i, 47–8.

must therefore be content with a few indications of the chief fashions and qualities to be found. The period is one of magnificent decay, of liberty degenerating into anarchy, of beauty and balance falling into floridness. Evidences of this disintegration showed themselves quite early, even while Shakespeare was still writing, but until the very end of its life in the drama blank verse was always capable of outbursts of splendid poetry.

There is one of Shakespeare's later contemporaries about the correctness of whose blank verse there can be no question. Ben Jonson never fell into the faults which were beginning, even when he was writing his classical tragedies, in the first decade of the seventeenth century, to beset writers of blank verse. His staple is the stiff endstopped type, not a little apt to be pompous, and, in Ben Jonson's hands, somewhat wanting in life and distinction, for he has not Marlowe's volcanic energy. These lines from *Catiline* (1611) are characteristic:

Behold | this sil|uer eagle
'Twas *Mar|ius* stand|ard, in | the *Cim|brian* warre
Fatall | to *Rome*; | and as | our Au|gures tell mee,
Shall still | be so: | for which | one om|enous cause,
I'have kept | it safe, | and done | it sac|red rites,
As to | a God|head; in | a Chap|ell built
Of pur|pose to | it. Pledge | then all | your hands,
To fol|low it, | with vowes | of death, | and ruine
Strooke sil|ently, | and home.[1]

There could not be a better example of grammatical overflow which fails to carry rhythmic overflow with it. The phrases which cross the line-breaks have no buoyancy, and the voice inevitably drops. It is noticeable also that the double ending is established by this time even for the rigid form of the metre.

[1] *Catiline*, Act III, p. G 3 b.

In the blank-verse fragments in *The Sad Shepherd*, a much later play, probably after 1630, we can see that Jonson has advanced a little in the direction which Shakespeare himself took; he can now achieve true overflow, and more grace and buoyancy, though not consistently, but he never learnt to construct complex rhythmic forms. His phrases seem to be added as they enter the mind, and give no effect of forethought or of having each a definite place in a complex scheme:

> But shee, as chaste, as was her name, *Earine*,
> Dy'd undeflowr'd: and now her sweet soule hovers,→
> Here, in this Aire, above us; and doth haste
> To get up to the *Moone*, and *Mercury*;
> And whisper *Venus* in her *Orbe*; then Spring→
> Up to old *Saturne*, and come down by *Mars*,
> Consulting *Jupiter*; and seate her selfe→
> Just in the midst with *Phoebus*; tempring all→
> The jarring Spheeres, and giving to the World→
> Againe, his first and tunefull planetting![1]

But until the last line or two the movement is still sadly mechanical. Jonson is apparently unable to achieve overflow where the second line begins with a trochee.

The best among Jacobean and Caroline dramatists were not always the best poets. Webster yields to none as a master of tragedy, but even when most tensely charged with passion his blank verse is often weak, with a constant tendency to outrun the base by not one but two extra light syllables, to admit heavy trisyllabic feet, or huddle thin and inadequate modulations into the middle of the line:

> Goe, go brag
> You have left | me heart|lesse, || mine | is in | your bosome,
> I hope | 'twill mult|iply loue | there: || You | doe tremble:
> Make not | your heart | so dead | a peece | of flesh
> To feare, | more then | to loue | me: Sir, | be confident,

[1] *The Sad Shepherd*, III, ii, *Works*, Vol. II, p. 153.

What is't | distracts | you ? || This | is flesh, | and blood, (Sir),
'Tis not | a fig|ure cut | in Al|abaster

Kneeles at | my hus|bands tombe : | Awake, | awake (man)
I do | here put | of all | vaine cer|emony,
And one|ly doe | appeare | to you, a yong | widow,
That claimes | you for | her husband, | and like | a widow,
I vse | but halfe | a blush | in't.[1]

Much of the scansion is doubtful. Line 10, for instance, might be an Alexandrine, and the scansion which seems natural for the first half of line 3, ' I hope | 'twill mult|iply |', throws the rest of the line awry. Very often, as in lines 6 and 8, the double ending is occasioned by an entirely unnecessary word. But in this particular passage the metre may be intended to mirror the Duchess's mood of extreme agitation and mental conflict.

Fletcher was among the most capable artists of Shakespeare's later contemporaries and disciples. The discipleship in rhythm is generally very evident, though it sometimes results in rather lumbering imitation, and Fletcher is fond of elephantine extensions of the last foot :

Where reas|on, time | and coun|sel are | our Camp-masters [2]
And to | ourselves | our own | fears, needs | a new way.[3]

But he can produce well-sustained passages of elevated and varied verse, with a distinct Shakespearean flavour :

Thou hallowed relique, || thou rich diamond→
Cut with thine own dust ; || thou for whose wide fame→
The world appears too narrow, || mans all thoughts,
Had they all tongues, too silent ; || thus I bow→

[1] *The Dutchesse of Malfy*, I, ii, p. C 4 a.
[2] *Bonduca*, I, ii, *Comedies and Tragedies*, p. Gggg 2 a.
[3] *Bonduca*, I, ii, *Comedies and Tragedies*, p. Gggg 2 a.

To thy | most hon|our'd ash|es ; || though | an enemy,
Yet friend to all thy worths : || sleep peaceably ; ||
Happinesse crown thy soul, and in thy earth→
Some Lawrel fix his seat, || there grow, and flourish,
And make thy grave an everlasting triumph.

Fare well all glorious Wars, now thou art gone,
And honest Arms adieu : all noble Battels
Maintain'd in thirst of honour, not of blood,
Fare well for ever.[1]

In *The Faithfull Shepheardesse* his blank verse, as well as his four-foot couplets, has a foretaste of Milton's in *Comus*.

Beaumont was often a more original and a smoother metrist than Fletcher. He can keep the modulations within due limits, and write with delicacy and grace :

I know thee to be full of all those deeds,
That we fraile men call good, but by the course
Of nature thou shouldst be as quickly chang'd,
As are the windes dissembling, as the Sea,
That now weares browes as smooth as virgins be,
Tempting the Merchant to invade his face,
And in an houre call his billowes vp
And shoot em at the Sun, destroying all
A carries on him.[2]

But if he is responsible for the main part of *Philaster*, he can also fall into complete metrical breakdown, and produce passages like the following, of which the second complete line simply will not scan, and the third is of the feeblest that can shuffle itself off as a five-foot line :

I'le set it
Like a prodigious starre for all | to gaze at,
And so high | and glowing : that other Kingdoms far and forraigne,
Shall reade it there ; nay trau|aile with it, till | they finde
No tongue to make it more, nor no more people ;[3]

Here again the extension of the second line may have an expressive purpose, though it is so blatantly clumsy and ineffective that one cannot help suspecting that a misprint

[1] *Bonduca*, V, i, *Comedies and Tragedies*, p. Iiii 2 a.
[2] *The Maides Tragedy*, p. E 3 a.
[3] *Philaster*, Act II, E 3 b (2nd edition, 1622. The text of the 1st edition is hopeless, as far as lines are concerned).

is responsible for the admission of the word ' other '. From writing like this it is but a step till we are floundering in such a quagmire of ' unrhythm ' as D'Avenant's *Albovine* (1629), a play not without respect in its day, and purporting to be written in blank verse:

' Slight, sir, d'ye→
Present | me with | a Cup, | made, o' th|bottome→
Of an Akehorne, or Queen *Mabbs* Thimble?
Fill me a bowle, where I may swimme,
And bathe my head, then rise like *Phoeb*|*us* from→
The Oc|ean, | shaking | my dew|y Locks.[1]

There are three cases of violent and clumsy overrunning. In the first full line the final trochee is even more than usually awkward after the common sixteenth-century elision of ' of the ' into one syllable; the second and third lines are hopeless, the fourth ends in a pyrrhic and overflows. The last line, of course, scans correctly if ' ocean ' is given the then optional trisyllabic pronunciation.

Throughout the period lapses of that kind are liable to occur, and become increasingly likely to occur, in the midst of tracts of competent, scannable, though hardly lively, blank verse. But on the other hand men of the second and third rank as dramatists may be expected to break into something very near perfection from time to time.

The following from Shirley's *Maid's Revenge* (1626) is a good piece of paragraph construction. It falls short of the masterly in having the stop four times successively in the middle of the fourth foot. But the rhythmic phrases are shapely, the modulations expressive, and there is neither too much nor too little of the double ending. It is fairly representative of the general level of Jacobean blank verse.

So I will dare my fortune to be cruell,
And like a mountanous peece of earth that suckes
The balls of hot Artillery, || I will stand→
And weary all the gunshot; || oh my soule→
Thou hast beene too long icy: || Alpes of snow→

[1] *Albovine*, II. i, p. D 2 a.

Have buried my whole nature. || It shall now→
Turne Element of fire, and fill the ayre
With bearded Comets, threatening death and horrour
For my wronged innocence, contemn'd, disgrac'd,
Nay mur|ther'd, | for with | *Anton|io*
My breath expired.[1]

We will conclude with something finer, perhaps the crowning achievement of post-Shakespearean blank verse. Calantha's death speech in Ford's *Broken Heart* (1633) would not have dishonoured Shakespeare, though he never wrote anything quite like it. It shows at its most perfect a technique advanced a stage further than Shakespeare's, though in the direction in which he was moving. Every line has double ending, and artistic discretion seems therefore to demand endstopping, so that the fluid effect of the double ending shall be checked; and there is no looseness of construction. Overflow being thus restricted, the variety and flexibility which blank verse needs are sought by multiplying pauses, and by exploring the effects of pause after a heavy and after a light syllable. The effects to be gained by such a technique are limited, and its success was brief and intermittent. But here, at any rate, we have it:

O, my Lords

I but deceiu'd your eyes with An|ticke gesture,
When one newes straight came hudling on | another,
Of death, || and death, || and death, || still I | danc'd forward,
But it strooke home, || and here, || and in | an instant.
Be such meere women, || who with shreeks | and out-cries
Can vow a present end to all | their sorrowes
Yet live to court new pleasures, || and out-live them.
They are the silent griefes which cut | the hart-strings.
Let me dye smiling.[2]

[1] *The Maids Revenge*, V, i, pp. I 1 b, I 2 a.
[2] *The Broken Heart*, V, [ii], p. K 3 b.

CHAPTER V

NON-DRAMATIC BLANK VERSE: MILTON TO COWPER

THE epic measure of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the most accomplished, magnificent, and wide-ranging of all types of blank verse, was rooted in the dramatic blank verse of the Elizabethans, and Milton himself early practised the measure in the masque before he moulded it to be the instrument of his great masterpiece.

The verse of *Comus* does not show many of the liberties and restrictions which afterwards became characteristic of Milton, and draws its beauties and its tunes from some of its immediate predecessors; a possible genealogy would derive it from *The Tempest*, through Fletcher's *The Faithfull Shepheardesse*.

The double ending is common, in the late Elizabethan manner:

> But O that hapless virgin our | lost sister,
> Where may she wander now, whether | betake her
> From the chill dew, amongst rude burrs | and thistles ? [1]

Even two extra syllables in the final foot occur with great expressive power, giving the effect of abundance and excess in the line:

> The Sea | o'refraught | would swell, | and th'un|sought diamonds [2]

[1] l. 350 ff. [2] l. 732.

Full anapaests are fairly common:

If you | let slip | time, like | a neglect|ed rose [1]

I must | not suf|fer this, | yet 'tis but | the lees [2]

And even an antibacchius, which will not glide into the likeness of a spondee, is found in the line:

And though | not mort|al, yet | a cold shud|dering dew. [3]

All these modulations occur in the truculent and drunken speech of Comus himself, most fittingly. And apparently Milton already had some feeling against heavy trisyllables, for he often clips his words of their final consonants, and suppresses the vowel of 'the', in order to change an anapaest into an iambus [4]:

Fear'd her stern frown, and she was queen oth' woods [5]

Tending my flocks hard by i'th hilly crofts [6]

Another of Milton's practices in this masque, which he afterwards forsook, is to give the disyllabic value to derivatives of Latin words which end in 'ion', 'ience':

How bit|ter is | such self|-delus|ion [7]

By a | strong sid|ing champ|ion Con|science [8]

But the monosyllabic value is also found:

And chid | her bark|ing waves | into | attention [9]

---

[1] l. 743. Alternative scansion,

If you let | slip time | like a| neglect|ed rose

[2] l. 809. Alternative scansion,

I must | not suffer | this, yet| 'tis but| the lees.

[3] l. 802.

[4] Milton's spelling, however, is a notoriously unsafe guide to his pronunciation or scansion. His lack of uniformity is shown in the examples given.

[5] l. 446. [6] l. 531. [7] l. 365. [8] l. 212. [9] l. 258.

Milton's general practice in *Comus*, however, suggests the following as the right scansion of the rather difficult line,

× / × / (×) × / (×) × / ××
In un|super|fluous eev|en proport|ion,[1]

rather than the alternative

× / × / × × / × × / ×
In un|super|fluous | eeven | proportion.[2]

The regular rising rhythm of the first is more in keeping with the meaning than the uneven effect given by the pyrrhic, trochee, and amphibrach. But 'proportion' would almost certainly have the second scansion in *Paradise Lost*.

Since *Comus* is a drama we find also the amphibrach before the pause when a line is divided between two speakers:

× / × / × / ×
. . . And crumb|le all | thy sinews. |

/ / × / ×
Elder Bro. Why prith|ee Shepherd . . .[3]

× / ×
Comus. . . . Root-bound, | that fled | Apollo. |

/ /
Lady. Fool do | not boast . . .[3]

The verse of *Comus* is, on the whole, much lighter and more graceful than Milton's characteristic later manner, but the grandeur which came to be associated with his name is occasionally foreshadowed, with the introduction of certain unusually heavy feet, such as an antibacchius in the first place, as in the magnificently expressive line,

(×) / / × × / / /
Th'earth cumb|er'd and | the wing'd | air dark'i | *with plumes*,[4]

---

[1] l. 773. [2] l. 615. [3] l. 663.

[4] l. 730. It is not certain that the 'e' was dropped entirely in pronunciation: Milton often spells with the apostrophe when it is necessary to pronounce the indeterminate vowel as a syllable.

× \ / /
Self fed, | and self| consum|'d, if | this fail

× ×
The pill|ar'd firm|ament | is rott|'nness

Comus, ll. 597–8.

where some of the heaviness is, however, due to the consonant clusters italicised, or in,

(×) / / × × × / / × × / /
Th'all-giv|er would be | unthank't, | would be | unprais'd—[1]

It will be noticed that in each case the heavy foot is followed immediately by a foot without a stress. The second line contains one of Milton's rare full tribrachs.

There is also an occasional cretic. But coming after an amphibrach in the following broken line the cretic has a very harsh character, and imperils the rhythm:

/ × / / × / ×
. . . As to | make this | relation ?

Spir. / × / × /
| Care and ut|most shifts . . .[2]

The glide-tribrach which Milton uses with such skill for certain effects, is to be found in *Comus*, as in the following lines, where, in combination with the pyrrhic, it emphasises the sense of weakness and disorder:

(×) × ×
And link't it self by carnal sens|ualty
× × (×) × ×
To a | degen|erate and | degraded state.[3]

Milton already allows himself complete freedom in the placing and multiplication of pauses within the line, though his commas do not always indicate a necessary pause in speech:

Into som brutish form of Woolf, or Bear,
Or ounce, or Tiger, Hog, or bearded Goat,[4]

and there is a much larger proportion of endstopped lines than in *Paradise Lost*. In Comus's speech of forty-nine lines against abstinence, thirty-seven are definitely endstopped, and there are three or four others where many readers would pause. It is chiefly in this respect that the versification of *Comus* differs from that of Milton's later

[1] l. 723.
[2] l. 617. An alternative would be to scan the line as an Alexandrine, but Milton's habits are against this.
[3] ll. 474–5.
[4] ll. 70–71.

works, for though the poet already commands perfect rhythmic overflow at will, his mastery over the intricate harmonies of the verse paragraph is not yet fully developed.

Any study of the verse of *Paradise Lost* must now of necessity be indebted to Dr. Bridges's detailed and systematic study of Milton's habits of versification in his *Milton's Prosody*.[1] The rules which he deduces form the basis of this account, though the phenomena are often described, and the verse scanned, differently.

When Milton took up, after a long period of poetic silence, the measure which he had practised, partly according to the Shakespearean usage, in *Comus*, he now, while adding incalculably to its scope, bound himself, perhaps unconsciously, and at the bidding of a delicate ear, by certain restrictions not usual among the Elizabethans.

The chief of these applies to trisyllabic feet. Milton increases the proportion of trisyllabic feet, particularly of anapaests, admitted into the iambic line, but at the same time limits himself to glide-anapaests only, of one or other of the two kinds described on page 14, either having a vowel suppressed before 'n', 'r', or 'l':

Whom reas|on hath e|quald, force hath made supream.[2]

His Temple right against the Temp|le of God.[3]

In am|orous dit|tyes all a Summers day.[4]

or having one light vowel which approximates to the value of 'w' or 'y':

For we have al|so our Eev|ning and our Morn.[5]

To set himself in Glor|y above | his Peers.[6]

Where glide or suppression takes place, Milton also allows an occasional amphibrach within the line:

Of riot | ascends above their loft|iest Towrs.[7]

That gave | thee being, | stil shades thee and protects.[8]

---

[1] Oxford: 1921. [2] I, 248. [3] I, 402. [4] I, 449.
[5] V, 628. [6] I, 39. [7] I, 499. [8] IX, 266.

and the peculiar amphibrach in the case of words like 'heaven', and with 'spirit', is often found:

Hail holy light, ofspring | of Heav'n | first-born [1]

Some wand|ring Spirit | of Heav'n | by Fountain side.[2]

Otherwise Milton limits the appearance of the amphibrach to the final foot, and it is not common even there; we do not find the 'dramatic' amphibrach before a pause.

Provided that it is countenanced by the glide, a dactyl may take any place where a trochee would be allowed:

Shadowie | sets off the face of things; in vain [3]

Given him | by this great Conference to know,[4]

and the cretic may appear instead of the spondee:

Stood to ent|ertain her Guest | from Heav'n; | no vaile [5]

No ingrate|ful food: and food alike those pure.[6]

The glide-tribrach is frequent, especially as forming part of an adjective ending in 'able', where sometimes either the last syllable or the last but two may be the one suppressed or slurred:

Abom|inable, | unutt|erable | and worse [7]

Where boldest: though to sight unconqu|erable [8]

But there are other occasions where each syllable of such a word must be given its full value, and a pyrrhic is therefore introduced into the scansion:

To make her am|ia|ble: on | she came,[9]

and where glide or suppression of a vowel is possible it by no means always takes place:

To whom | the An|gel with contracted brow.[10]

---

[1] III, 1. [2] IV, 531. [3] V, 43. [4] V, 454. [5] V, 383.
[6] V, 407. [7] II, 626. [8] VI, 118. [9] VIII, 483. [10] VIII, 560.

Often scansion must give one trisyllabic foot in a line when two glides are possible, and a choice has to be made:

Shot par|alel | to the earth | his dewie ray [1]
Shot par|alel to | the earth | his dewie ray.[1]

The fact that Milton, contrary to his habit, printed 'the earth', and not 'th'earth', makes it probable, though not certain, that the second is the scansion which he intended.

Another problematic line is

Of something not unseas|onable | to ask [2]
Of something not unseas|ona|ble to ask.[2]

The question is not an unimportant one, involving a mere difference of notation, but denotes a real difference of reading. Dr. Bridges suggests [3] that Milton's habit with similar adjectives would support the second reading, but the first is more natural to a modern ear.

The scattered examples of the final amphibrach usually have a light inflectional syllable as their last syllable, and are found oftenest when the line ends in a present participle:

I also err'd in overmuch | admiring [4]
The fruitless hours but neither self | condemning [5]

The frequency of trisyllabic feet, and the fact that they are of certain kinds, and often connected with classes of words of similar formation, is one of the main factors in giving Milton's verse its individual character. Another, though of relatively rare occurrence, is a singular boldness in the use of falling feet in modulation. A trochee comes with a specially marked effect following a pyrrhic:

To the | Garden | of bliss, thy seat prepar'd [6]
Before thy fell|ows, am|bitious | to win.[7]

---

[1] V, 141. [2] VIII, 201. [3] *Milton's Prosody*, p. 25.
[4] IX, 1178. [5] IX, 1188. [6] VIII, 299. [7] VI, 160.

And in the line

Yet fell; remem|ber and | fear to | transgress[1]

it seems to emphasise the chilly note of warning. When this occurs at the end of a line the rhythm is so shaken as to suggest that Milton must have meant the words forming the final feet to be stressed on the last syllable:

Beyond all past examp|le and | future[2]

Of Thrones and mighty Ser|aphim | prostrate;[3]

though in the second case the unusual rhythm, if we keep the modern pronunciation, certainly enforces the sense. But a trochee in the last place, whatever precedes it, is always disturbing. In the following line it follows an iambus with equally shattering effect, here not in keeping with the meaning of the words:

Which of us who beholds | the bright | surface.[4]

After a spondee a trochee comes with remarkable effect, fully expressive:

Mee mee | onely | just object of his ire.[5]

Another type of rhythmic phrase which occurs several times is often denoted by two trochees at the beginning of the line, but these lines are better scanned with a monosyllabic first foot and an anapaest later in the line.

Un|ivers|al reproach, | far worse | to beare,[6]

Shoots | invis|ible virt|ue even | to the deep.[7]

Dr. Bridges realises the truth of these scansions when he makes the remarkable statement that 'Milton came to scan his verses one way and to read them in another',[8]

[1] VI, 912. [2] X, 840. [3] VI, 841.
[4] VI, 472. [5] X, 936. [6] VI, 34 [7] III, 586.
[8] *Milton's Prosody*, p. 35.

remarkable because scansion is nothing if not a description of the way in which lines are pronounced, an attempt to show exactly the relation of the rhythm to the base. What Dr. Bridges means, however, is that Milton admits such lines because, with his usual allowance for suppression and glide, it is possible to divide them into feet of types which he habitually uses, though in the second line the scansion becomes a torturing Procrustes bed:

/ × /× × / (×) /(×) × × /
Shoots in|visi|ble vir|tue even to | the deep.

It is hard to believe that Milton composed on such principles: more probably, like other poets, he composed by ear, his ear usually rejecting any but light trisyllabic feet, though very occasionally admitting them, and doubtless in the two lines under consideration, admitting them more readily in compensation for the monosyllabic feet with which the lines open. In any case, the method of scansion which Bridges attributes to Milton is one which loses sight of all the skill and art involved in modulation, and in combining different kinds of feet. For both lines the emphasis which the monosyllabic foot gives to the first syllable is entirely fitting, and in the second, if we give the full rhythmic value to 'virtue even', instead of suppressing the second vowel of both words, we have a far more expressive rhythm. The long vowels in falling cadences, where, after 'shoots', we are prepared for some bright glittering image like 'shafts', enhance the value of the word 'invisible', and impress on us that the heavenly arrow is no concrete missile, but a spiritual influence.

Similarly it is more impressive to scan,

× / \ × / × / × / × /
Of Rain|bows and Star|rie Eyes | the Wat|ers thus,[1]

than to avoid the dreaded full anapaest by,

× / \ × / (×) / × / × /
Of Rain|bows and | Starrie Eyes | the Wat|ers thus.[1]

A monosyllabic first foot in a blank verse line, though rare in Shakespeare and after him, is not so uncommon, or so

[1] VII, 446.

startling in its effect, as a monosyllable in any other place. But even so, the scansion with such a foot and an antibacchius seems more representative of the difficult line,

× × / × / / × / × / /
As a | despite | don | against | the most High,[1]

where emphasis and isolation combine with alliteration to enable the rather colourless word 'done' to express the enormity of Lucifer's offence, than the alternative with two trochees,

/ × / × / × / /
As a | despite | don a|gainst the | most High,[1]

and the extremely heavy final foot emphasises the augustness of the 'most High'.

The second important subject which must call our attention in dealing with *Paradise Lost* is the poet's management of pause and major rhythms. That pause may occur anywhere in a line, and that there need be no pause at the end, is a common allowance which Milton shared with Shakespeare and most of the dramatists, but one of the distinguishing characteristics of the movement of Milton's verse is the frequency of lines with two or more breaks. The line,

× / × × × / × \
Unshak'n, || unseduc'd, || unterrifi'd[2]

is an example of a very common type, which often, as in this case, owes its beauty to the crossing of the foot divisions by three quite different rhythmic phrases, which give variety to the tune composed of three similarly built words. The same skill in varying the rhythmic groups is shown in the gradation from longer to shorter phrases of

/ × × / × / × × /
Regions of sorrow, || doleful shades, || where peace[3]

though such a line is not so essentially Miltonic in rhythm.

Another common type of line in *Paradise Lost* is composed of five separate nouns, where the same delicate adjustments of length are heard, and the pauses emphasise the counter-

[1] VI, 906. [2] V, 899. [3] I, 65.

melody which the rhythms of the words set up against the foot-division :

Thrones, || Dominations, || Princedoms, || Vertues, || Powers.[1]

Rather less common is a similarly built line in four phrases :

Honour, || Dominion, || Glorie, || and renowne.[2]

Except in lines of this type, consisting of four or more separated words, a break within the first or last foot is very rare, and is only found where it serves some special purpose, as in the following case, where the scorn, pity, and indignation gathered in the single word ' proud ', necessitate its emphasis and isolation by all possible means :

Proud, || art thou met ? thy hope was to have reacht
The highth of thy aspiring unoppos'd ;[3]

or in the following, when the stupendous nature of the circumstance is ushered in by a very lightly stressed monosyllable made portentous by isolation :

What won|der ? || when→
Millions of fierce encountring Angels fought
On either side.[4]

But a single word, covering a whole foot or more, is quite often thus isolated at the beginning of a line, when it is usually an important adjective following its noun, or far separated from it and used adverbially :

Sapience and Love
Immense [5]
And now came forth
Spontaneous.[6]

In the later case ' spontaneous ' refers to a noun three lines earlier.

About half the lines have definite overflow, and a rhythmic unit may, at its smallest, consist of one syllable, as in the famous

Rocks, Caves, Lakes, Fens, Bogs, Dens, and shades of death,[7]

[1] V, 601. [2] VI, 422. [3] VI, 132. [4] VI, 219 ff.
[5] VII, 195. [6] VII, 203. [7] II, 621.

or at its greatest, may cover several lines, as in the equally well-known

> Him the Almighty Power
> Hurld headlong flaming from th'Ethereal Skie
> With hideous ruine and combustion down
> To bottomless perdition,[1]

where, whatever the strain on the reader's breath, it is essential to the effect of continuous and unimaginable descent that there shall be no pause till Lucifer arrives in Hell. But such long unbroken phrases are rare, and generally, in a passage where a long phrase does occur, phrases of gradually increasing length lead up to it, and unless it closes a paragraph or marked division of matter, the descent is made in the same way.

Where there is overflow, the line-break generally comes between two grammatical divisions of the sentence, such as subject and predicate, or where a slight pause is made for the introduction of an adverbial or adjectival phrase:

> What in me is dark
> Illumine [2]

> Nine times the Space that measures Day and Night
> To mortal men, he with his horrid crew
> Lay vanquisht.[3]

Between words more closely linked it is rarer, as between a preceding adjective and its noun:

> Th'originals of Nature in thir crude→
> Conception [4]

> inlaid with pure→
> Amber,[5]

or in the following very expressive instance, where the progressive increase of weight, reaching its height on the last stress, and the line-end, breaking into a group of very closely linked words, enforce the idea of chaos and disaster:

> horrid confus|ion heapt→
> Upon | confus|ion rose.[6]

Overflow from a preposition to a noun is not found.

[1] I, 44 ff. [2] I, 22. [3] I, 50 ff. [4] VI, 511. [5] VI, 758. [6] VI, 668.

To give any adequate account of the infinite resource and art with which Milton builds up his verse paragraph would be a very lengthy undertaking. It must suffice to take one such paragraph and remark briefly upon it. The following is chosen, not for any qualities of abnormal or ostentatious power, but for its comparative brevity. The lengths of the rhythmic phrases are indicated in feet, and the numbers at the beginning of each line indicate the foot or feet after which a pause occurs:

2. So promis'd hee,[2] || and Uriel to his charge→
1. 5. Return'd [4] || on that bright beam, whose point now raisd [4]
4. Bore him slope downward to the Sun [4] || now fall'n→
2½. 5. Beneath th' Azores ;[3+] || whither the prime Orb,[2+]
3. Incredible how swift,[3] || had thither rowl'd→
1½. 5. Diurnal,[3+] || or this less volubil Earth [3+]

3. By shorter flight to th'East,[3] || had left him there→
Arraying with reflected Purple and Gold→
5. The Clouds that on his Western Throne attend [12]:
3. Now came still Eevning on,[3] || and Twilight gray
5. Had in hir sober Liverie all things clad [7];
3. 5. Silence accompanied,[3] || for Beast and Bird [2]
3. They to thir grassie Couch,[3] || these to thir Nests→
1. 5. Were slunk,[3] || all but the wakeful Nightingale [4];
5. She all night long her amorous descant sung [5];
2. Silence was pleas'd [2]: || now glow'd the Firmament→

2½. With living Saphirs [5+]: || Hesperus that led→
2. 3½. 5. The starrie Host,[4+] || rode brightest,[1+] || till the Moon[1+]
4. 5. Rising in clouded Majestie,[4] || at length [1]
2. 5. Apparent Queen [2] || unvaild her peerless light [3]
5. And o're the dark her Silver Mantle threw. [5] ||[1]

Of the twenty-one lines ten are endstopped, and only two have no pause either within the line or at the end. Nine have two pauses, including end-pause, but only one has more than one internal pause. These proportions are fairly representative. It will be noticed that the commonest

[1] IV, 589–609. To some extent the phrasing will depend on the individual reader. Also there are many degrees in the length of pause, which cannot be shown.

place for internal pause is after the third foot. This occurs five times, but the rhythm of the three feet before the pause is never on two occasions the same:

Incredible how swift
By shorter flight to th' East
Now came still Eevning on
Silence accompanied
They to thir grassie Couch

The difference between the last two, which are the openings of two consecutive lines, is very slight, but they occur in a passage where balance, as we shall see, has a special expressive purpose. The same kind of variety can be traced between the three consecutive four-foot phrases, which are distinguished by the place which they occupy in a line or lines,

And Uriel to his charge Returnd
On that bright beam whose point now raisd
Bore him slope downward to the Sun

And where two consecutive three-foot phrases have the same rhythm

They to thir grassie couch
These to thir Nests Were slunk

the correspondence, together with the opening trochee of each, bringing the stress on ' They ' and ' these ', emphasises the grammatical antithesis. It is here also that two consecutive lines have the common pause after three feet of almost identical rhythm, and the rhythmic balance and regularity of the whole passage help to carry out the idea or orderliness and peace prevailing over the natural life of Paradise. In the phrases, also consecutive and of the same length,

had thither rowld Diurnal
or this less volubil Earth

the contrast between the smooth regularity of the first and the slow hampered movement of the second corresponds with the thought. 'Diurnal' isolated by a pause at the beginning of a line, gains increased importance, and we get full value out of its splendid rolling sound, which has an effect quite distinct from the meaning, enhancing the image of the revolving sphere. A further remarkably effective rhythm is heard in the slow, but not heavy or loud, progress conveyed by the spondees in

/ / / / × /
Now came still Eevning on

where the combined effect of slowness and quiet smoothness is due to the long stressed vowels following one another in a natural sequence, and to the absence of harsh or heavy consonants. Through the leisurely quiet phrase which follows, the shadows of evening seem to be slowly lengthened out.

The contrast between the two descriptions of the sky is notable and interesting; a pauseless and smoothly upheld section of more than two complete lines as fitly conveys the spreading array of the sunset sky as the sharply broken rhythm of the passage from 'Hesperus' to 'apparent Queen' suggests the twinkling and scattered lights of the darkening heavens. In the same passage the isolated single-foot phrase 'at length' is charged with expectancy, which is gradually fulfilled through progressively lengthening phrases, as the awaited moon is realised, first in her own queenly splendour, and then as a bountiful and wide-ranging influence.

Such an examination gives us some idea of the means by which variety and expressiveness are obtained among the rhythmic phrases themselves, but we have still given no account of the mechanism by which all are bound together into a shapely and significant whole. This is just where our notation fails us, though it can tell us a little. Milton's paragraphs always begin and end with the beginning and end of a line. At the end of a paragraph, therefore, if nowhere else, the rhythmic fall, or end of a phrase,

will coincide with the end of a line. We shall also find that the closing line tends to be metrically regular, at least in its last three feet, the changing harmonies of the passage thus resolving themselves into cadence and quietness. But these conditions of metrical regularity and coincidence of line-end with phrase-end may be fulfilled within the paragraph, as they are three times in the paragraph we are considering, where Milton plainly does not intend a conclusive pause, as he punctuates only with a colon or semicolon. But we may ask ourselves with little success why we do not drop our voices and expect the final pause at 'nightingale' or 'sung'. What actually happens, of course, is that the pitch-rhythm remains level or rises, while the stress-rhythm reaches its cadence, but what qualities in the succession of words induce this to happen is a question which baffles investigation. In the case of 'nightingale', the weakness of the final stress partly accounts for the absence of finality, but the line which follows:

> And all night long her amorous descant sung

might well, in another context, be conclusive. At the end of the line:

> The Clouds that on his Western Throne attend

the voice does fall, though not conclusively. It is the central pause or half-way house, for the paragraph is composed of two pictures, of evening among the heavenly spheres, and of evening in the Garden of Eden. The long unbroken section of twelve feet, which embodies the pageant of sunset, closes the first scene, and forms the climax of the passage, for in it are concentrated all the colour and brilliance of the imagery, and the transition from the ethereal to the earthly scene is made through the sunset, which takes part in both. Such intermediate pauses, at intervals of not much more than ten lines, are necessary in complex overflowing verse, for the readjustment of the actual rhythm with the base. The impression of the base line would otherwise be lost. After each such readjustment

the rhythm is launched forth upon a fresh progress of interweaving harmonies towards the final resolution. The progression towards and away from a long central sweep of rhythm, or to a single word or short phrase, which sheds its light of thought or imagery over the whole, is a common constructive plan in Milton's shorter paragraphs. But infinite and indescribable varieties and complications of form are of course possible in the longer ones.

The prosody of *Paradise Regained* is similar to that of *Paradise Lost*, except in one or two details. We notice an extension in the use of the more unusual and disturbing modulations, against which it is very difficult to keep the base in mind. The pyrrhic-trochee combination is the most important of these:

With them from bliss | to the | bottom|less deep [1]

And made him bow | to the | Gods of | his Wives [2]

Cast wanton eyes | on the | daughters | of men [3]

The double trochee opening occurs in,

After forty days fasting had remain'd [4]

The alternative,

Aft|er fort|y days fast|ing had remain'd

is not here more attractive, as there is no particular reason for strong emphasis on the first syllable of 'after'.

Trisyllabic feet are nearly always accounted for, as in *Paradise Lost*, by glide or suppression:

Against | the Spirit|ual Foe | and broughtst him thence [5]

Glory he | requires | and glory he receives [6]

No advant|age and his strength as oft assay [7]

Aim at | the highest | without the high|est attain'd [8]

---

[1] I, 361. [2] II, 171. [3] II, 180. [4] I, 243.
[5] I, 10. [6] III, 117. [7] II, 234. [8] IV, 107.

Lines with several pauses, so characteristic of *Paradise Lost* and showing the same skill in the crossing of rhythms, are also found:

× / × / × / × × × / Apollo, || Neptune, || Jupiter, || or Pan [1]

× / × / × / / × / Ejected, | emptyed, | gazed, | unpityed, | shun'd [2]

No more excellent instance of the power of metre to enhance the suggestiveness of words is to be found anywhere than in the overflow and modulations of the lines,

× × × / × / and in retiring draw→

/ / × × Hearts aft|er them | tangl'd in Amorous Nets [3]

But it is in power of sustained articulation that *Paradise Regained* shows a decline from the mastery of *Paradise Lost*. Technical symptoms of the decline are the enormous increase of endstopping and of the final amphibrach. Passages like this are not at all infrequent:

Lictors and rods and ensigns of thir power ||
Legions and Cohorts, turmes of horse and wings: ||
Or Embassies from Regions far remote ||
In various habits on the Appian road, ||
Or on the Aemilian, some from farthest South, ||
Syene, or wher the shadow both way falls ||
Meroe, Nilotic Isle, and more to West, ||
The Realm of Bocchus to the Black-moor Sea; ||
From the Asian Kings and Parthian among these, ||
From India and the golden Chersoness, ||
And utmost Indian Isle Taprabane ||
Dusk faces with white silken Turbants wreath'd: || [4]

And the repeated use of double endings gives a looser character to the versification

Since thou hast dar'd | × / × to utter
The abominable terms, impious | × / × condition;
But I endure the time, till which expir'd
Thou hast permission on me. It | × / × is written
The first of all Commandments, Thou | × / × shalt worship [5]

[1] II, 90. [2] I, 414. [3] II, 163. [4] IV, 65 ff. [5] IV, 172 ff.

The extension of the last foot, instead of being due to an unimportant inflexionable syllable, may be an independent word:

> Incessantly, and to his read|ing brings not
> A spirit and a judgment [1]

or the foot may be doubly extended:

> Great Benefactors of mankind, | Deliverers [2]

Further extension of the liberties of modulation, but a renewal of power in expressive artistry and architecture, characterize the verse of *Samson Agonistes*. Here the regular blank verse is interspersed with choric passages of free verse in lines of varying length, mainly iambic in character. It is always possible to scan these verses, and so measure their freedom, on an iambic base, but they are often most effective when enjoyed for their own speech- or chanting-movement, and not in relation to any metrical base. But as the iambic pattern is constantly impressing itself on the free speech-rhythms of the choric passages, so the unfettered movements of the free rhythm in their turn influence the metrical verse which is the staple of the poem, and account for the freer modulation and the more unusual combinations of feet. Full trisyllables are admitted rarely:

> Wilt thou | then serve | the Phil|istines with | that gift [3]
> But prov|idence or | instinct of nature seems [4]
> She's gone, | a man|ifest Serp|ent by her sting [5]
> Or by | evas|ions thy crime | uncoverst more [6]

In one case the juxtaposition of two syllables which fall under Milton's allowance for suppression gives us a chor-iambus in modulation:

> The myst|ery | of God | giv'n me und|er pledge [7]

---

[1] IV, 323. [2] III, 82. [3] l. 577. [4] l. 1545. [5] l. 999. [6] l. 842. [7] l. 378.

This can be avoided by a scansion which suppresses the second syllables of 'mystery' and of 'given'

× / (×)× × | / / (×) × / × / | The myst|ery of | God giv'n | me und|er pledge [1]

But the sense of the line seems to require these important words to have their full value.

The pyrrhic-trochee rhythm is found:

× × / × | For his | people | of old: what hinders now? [2]

also the double trochee:

/ × / × | That invincible Samson, far renown'd [3]

/ × / × | Can they think me so broken, so debas'd [4]

For the first the alternative

/ × / × × / | That | invinc|ible Sam|son far renown'd

is desirable; for the second it is hardly possible:

/ × / × / / | Can | they think | me so brok|en, so | debas'd

In another case two trochees, even within the line, seem to offer the only possible scansion:

× / × × / \ / × × / × | Her spur|ious | first-born; | Treason | against me [5]

But the line is almost impossible to read without giving a stress to 'born' in an endeavour to set the movement right.

The spondee followed by a pyrrhic, of which so effective a use is made once in *Paradise Regained*, occurs with equal impressiveness in the description of the destruction of the theatre:

× / / / × × | The whole | roof aft|er them | with burst | of thunder [6]

The extended final foot is used, and may be doubly extended:

× / × × | No bet|ter way | I saw | then by | importuning [7]

---

[1] l. 378. [2] l. 1533. [3] l. 341. [4] l. 1335. [5] l. 391. [6] l. 1651. [7] l. 797.

But this does not lead to curtailment of overflow. Long phrases of more than a whole line are characteristic of the rhythm of *Samson Agonistes*, and in consequence there is rather less frequent middle pause. The following few lines are representative:

5. I cannot praise thy Marriage choises, Son, ||
3. Rather approv'd them not; || but thou didst plead→
Divine impulsion prompting how thou mightst→
5. Find some occasion to infest our Foes. ||
2. 4. I state not that; || this I am sure; || our Foes→
Found soon occasion thereby to make thee→
3½. Thir captive, and thir triumph; || thou the sooner→
2. 5. Temptation found'st, || or over-potent charms ||
To violate the sacred trust of silence→
Deposited within thee; [1]

But one of the most beautiful and artistic lines in the whole poem owes its expressiveness to its three internal pauses:

/ × × / × × × / × /
Eyeless || in Gaza || at the Mill || with slaves.[2]

The years following Milton's death saw the swift rise and almost complete ascendancy of the heroic couplet as the vehicle for substantial poems. But at the same time a thin but continuous undercurrent of blank-verse production carried the tradition forward to the more genial times which came in the later part of the eighteenth century. The completeness with which Milton's authority was at once acknowledged as the fountain of inspiration and instruction in all blank-verse technique outside the drama is shown by the habit of poets of labelling their productions not as 'a poem in blank verse', but as 'a poem in the manner of Milton'.

Some of these early attempts 'in the manner of Milton' do more credit to their perpetrators' loyalty than to their critical power, and the blank verse of Roscommon's translation of the *Ars Poetica* of Horace staggers woefully, wailing for the crutch of rhyme:

> Let poets match their Subject to their Strength
> And often try what Weight they can support
> And what their Shoulders are too weak to bear,
> After a serious and judicious Choice,
> Method and eloquence will never fail.[3]

[1] ll. 430 ff. [2] l. 41. [3] *Art of Poetry*, p. 21.

Addison, in a translation from the *Aeneid*, which he hopefully entitled *Milton's Stile Imitated*, produced some very blank verses indeed:

/ / / / /
He ended here, and now profuse of tears ||
/ / \ / × × × /
In suppliant mood fell prostrate at our feet: ||
/ / / / /
We bade him speak from whence, and what he was, ||
/ / / / \ /
And how by stress of fortune sunk thus low; ||
/ / / / /
Anchises too with friendly aspect mild ||
/ × × / / / × / ××
Gave him his hand, sure pledge of amity; ||
× / × / × × × / × /
When, thus encour|aged, || he | began his tale. || [1]

A more skilful *imitation* of Milton's metrical effects is found in the mock-heroic *Cyder* of John Philips. The intention is avowed:

> Thy Gift, *Pomona*, in Miltonian Verse
> Adventurous I presume to sing; [2]

but the effect, owing to the jesting tone, is one of parody rather than discipleship. Philips does not do so well when he tries to reproduce Milton's style seriously in *Blenheim*. Milton's thunders are, however, not ill suggested, and are by no means travestied, in a passage like the following:

> Mean while, the loosen'd Winds
> Infuriate, molten Rocks and flaming Globes
> Hurl'd high above the Clouds; 'till, all their Force
> Consum'd, her rav'nous Jaws th'Earth satiate clos'd [3]

James Thomson in *The Seasons* was the first poet after Milton to use blank verse with genuine artistry. He was, of course, much indebted to Milton, caught his habits of vocabulary and phrasing, often echoes his rhythms, and approaches his more level and less august manner. But amid much that rather weakly echoes the organ-notes of

[1] *Milton's Stile Imitated*, *Miscellaneous Works*, p. 150.
[2] *Cyder*, Book I, p. 1. [3] *Cyder*, Book I, p. 15.

his master, Thomson often strikes out a passage of pure poetry of his own, as in the end of the following passage:

> Thus all Day long the full-distended Clouds
> Indulge their genial Stores, and well-showr'd Earth
> Is deep enrich'd with vegetable Life;
> Till, in the Western Sky, the downward Sun
> Looks out illustrious from amid the Flush
> Of broken Clouds, gay-shifting to his Beam.[1]

When he is at his best, and especially in *Winter* which was written first, he commands a harmony that has very little echo of Milton. In the following, though the level is raised, and the diction Miltonic, the rhythmic effects are new. Thomson shows himself most deft in the economical use of modulations. He gets full value out of the few substituted feet, and out of each overflow:

> Huge *Up*|*roar* lords | it wide. | The clouds | commix'd→
> With stars | swift-glid|ing sweep | along | the sky.
> All nat|ure reels. || Till nat|ure's King|, who oft→
> Amid | tempest|uous dark|ness dwells | alone,
> And on | the wings | of the | career|ing wind→
> Walks dread|fully | serene, | commands | a calm;
> Then straight | air, || sea, || and earth || are hush'd | at once.[2]

The note of the whole passage is set by the spondee with which it opens. The sense of confusion is conveyed by overflow from line 1 to 2. The spondee and the early pause produce the required effect in line 3. An impression of breadth and power is given by the two long phrases

[1] *Spring*, p. 12.

[2] *Winter*, 1730, p. 15.

This is from the Author's revised edition. The passage as it first appeared in 1726 was much inferior as well as shorter:

> Wild Uproar lords it wide: the Clouds commixt
> With Stars, swift-gliding, sweep along the Sky.
> All Nature reels—But hark! the *Almighty* speaks:
> Instant the chidden Storm begins to pant,
> And dies, at once, into a noiseless calm. (p. 9.)

It is interesting to note, besides the more dignified and euphonious phrasing, the strengthening feeling for paragraph construction.

beginning with the last foot of line 3 and ending with the third foot of line 6. A pyrrhic and a half-stressed iambus bring the appropriate lightness and swiftness into line 5. The imperious note is suggested by the brevity of the phrase which occupies the last two feet of line 6, and the idea of prompt cessation by the many abrupt pauses in the last line. These, of course, are all rather obvious and easy effects. Anything more subtle and spiritual would have been beyond Thomson's powers, but he was wise enough not to attempt it.

Blair in *The Grave* and Young in *Night Thoughts* do not approach Thomson in command of the measure. Blair attempts overflow, but none of his modulations mean very much, and his grouping of feet sometimes makes his lines stagger to no purpose, as in the last line of the passage to be quoted. Such movement as there is is of the melancholy rhetorical cast, and suggests a certain kind of pulpit- or reading-desk-rhythm. One interesting feature of Blair's verse, however, is that, unlike Thomson and his other contemporaries, he makes rather much use of the extended fifth foot, indicating a familiarity with the dramatists of the previous century, a curious taste in a Scottish divine of his generation and cast of mind, but he uses few other trisyllables :

> Oh! then the longest Summer's Day
> Seem'd too too much in Haste: Still the full Heart
> Had not imparted half: 'Twas Happiness
> Too exquisite to last. Of Joys | departed
> Not to | return, | how pain|ful the | Remembrance![1]

The metre of *Night Thoughts* trickles rather thinly, and is alternately insipid and blatant. There are few modulations; of those hardly any are trisyllabic, and the pyrrhic is the most frequent. A strong pause about the middle of the line is very common, but there is nearly always another

[1] *The Grave*, p. 8.

pause, which may be slighter, at the end, so that true overflow is rare:

> The Bell strikes *One*: || We take no note of Time, ||
> But from its Loss. || To give it then a Tongue, ||
> Is wise in man. || As if an Angel spoke, ||
> I feel the solemn Sound. || If heard aright, ||
> It is the Knell of my departed Hours.
> Where are they? || with the years beyond the Flood: [1]

Dyer's georgic, *The Fleece*, is of little account as poetry, but prosodically it is more interesting than either of the poems just mentioned. Dyer has a sense of rhythm, and can compass true overflow, and there is a pleasant variety in the modulation and movement of his phrases:

> This is no vulgar scene: no palace roof→
> Was e'er so lofty, nor so nobly rise→
> × × / / × /
> Their polish'd pil|lars, || as | these ag|ed oaks,
> Which o'er our fleecy wealth and harmless sports
> Thus have expanded wide their shelt'ring arms,
> Thrice told an hundred summers. [2]

Armstrong's *Art of Preserving Health* is another poem which, though hampered by the technicalities of its subject, which the author sometimes tries to gild by periphrasis, is full of poetry, of a limpid, musical, sometimes sonorous, and not always Miltonic kind. But Armstrong is too easily allured by adjectives:

> The shades descend, and midnight o'er the world→
> Expands her sable wings. Great nature droops→
> Thro' all her works. Now happy he whose toil
> Has o'er his languid powerless limbs diffus'd
> A pleasing lassitude: He not in vain
> Invokes the gentle deity of dreams.[3]

But he is much given to endstopping, and though often graceful in phrasing, his verse lacks variety in consequence:

> While on the neighbouring hill the rose inflames
> The verdant spring; in virgin beauty blows
> The tender lily, languishingly sweet;
> O'er every hedge the wanton woodbine roves,
> And autumn ripens in the summer's ray.

---

[1] *The Complaint*, Night I, ll. 54 ff., p. 5.
[2] *The Fleece*, Book I, ll. 632 ff., p. 37.
[3] *The Art of Preserving Health*, Book III, p. 84.

No less the warmer living tribes demand
The fost'ring sun: whose energy divine
Dwells not in mortal fire; whose generous heat
Glows thro' the mass of grosser elements,
And kindles into life the pond'rous spheres.[1]

In Akenside's *Pleasures of the Imagination* we find the most competent handling of blank verse in Milton's own manner. Akenside is more consistently imitative than Thomson. Even at his best he has Milton's tricks of phrasing and syntax, and cannot get away from his habits of modulation, or at least it seems only through Milton that he can achieve excellence, as the two versions following, of the same lines, will show. The first, which was printed in all the earlier editions of the poem, is feeble and commonplace:

Ev'n on the barriers of the world untir'd
She meditates th'eternal depth below;
Till half recoiling, down the headlong steep
She plunges; soon o'erwhelm'd and swallow'd up
In that immense of being. There her hopes
Rest at the fated goal[2]

It is by approaching nearer to Milton's manner, striving for the secret of his intricate paragraph organization, that Armstrong manages to express himself more fully, and with something of his master's own powerful energy and onset. But at times he seems to carry overflow too far. He has no difficulty in upholding the rhythm, but he does sometimes find it difficult to achieve the necessary cadence and resolution at the end of the paragraph:

Upon the wide creation's utmost shore→
At length she stands, and the dread space beyond→
Contemplates, half-recoiling: nathless down→
The gloomy void, astonish'd, yet unquell'd,
She plungeth; down the unfathomable gulph→
Where God alone hath being. There her hopes→
Rest at the fated goal.[3]

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[1] *The Art of Preserving Health*, Book I, pp. 20–21.
[2] *Pleasures of the Imagination*, 1744, Book I, p. C 2 b.
[3] *Pleasures of the Imagination*, on an enlarged plan, Book I, *Poems*, 1772, p. 138.

The staple of Cowper's blank verse is only faintly Miltonic, but is almost constantly so. The echoes may extend only to a foot or two, but they come very often. Cowper's own good taste restrained him from attempting Milton's grandeur and sonority, and his discipleship shows itself chiefly in his great discretion in the handling of pause, by which he often produces finely moulded paragraphs. There are dreary and soporific stretches in *The Task*, but when lifted up by his subject, Cowper achieves an unstudied freedom of movement, an effortless fluency, which is an advance on any eighteenth century execution in the measure. This is not much above his normal level:

> Man scarce had risen, obedient to His call→
> Who formed | him from | the dust, his future grave
> When he was crowned as never king was since.
> God set the diadem upon his head,
> And angel choirs attended. Wondering stood→
> The new-made monarch, while before him passed,
> All happy, and all perfect in their kind,
> The creatures, summoned from their various haunts
> To see their sovereign, and confess his sway.[1]

A quite different effect in a different mood is as trim, light and colloquial as the run of the couplet in Pope's *Epistles*:

> Behold the picture! is it like?—Like whom?
> The things that mount the rostrum with a skip,
> And then skip down again; pronounce a text,
> Cry—hem; and, reading what they never wrote,
> Just fifteen minutes, huddle up their work,
> And with a well-bred whisper close the scene![2]

When Cowper attempts the grand style, it is as often in Shakespeare's manner as in Milton's. Excepting the second line, which is Miltonic, the following passage might be mistaken for a piece of Elizabethan blank verse:

[1] *The Task*, Book VI, ll. 348 ff., *Poems*, p. 348.
[2] *The Task*, Book II, ll. 408 ff., *Poems*, p. 275.

Fires from beneath, and meteors from above,
Portentous, unexampled, unexplained,

× (×) /
Have kindled beacons in the skies, | and the old
And crazy earth has had her shaking fits
More frequent, and forgone her usual rest.
Is it a time to wrangle, when the props→
And pillars of our planet seem to fail
And Nature with a dim and sickly eye
To wait the close of all ?[1]

And occasional passages go beyond any tradition, and prophesy Wordsworth :

Nor rural sights alone, but rural sounds
Exhilarate the spirit, and restore
The tone of languid nature. Mighty winds,
That sweep the skirt of some far-spreading wood
Of ancient growth, make music not unlike
The dash of ocean on his winding shore.[2]

The fragment of *Yardley Oak* promises a more sustained and accomplished execution than we find in *The Task*, but the Miltonic echo is here more constant, for in the hundred and fifty lines which Cowper finished there is little change of mood. But there is noticeable a much greater daring and assurance, and a firmer touch, especially in respect of overrunning :

Time made thee what thou wast, king of the woods,
And Time hath made thee what thou art— || a cave→
For owls to roost in. || Once thy spreading boughs→
O'erhung the champaign ; || and the numerous flocks→
That grazed it stood beneath that ample cope→

× / × × / /
Uncrowd|ed, || yet | safe-shelt|ered from the storm. ||
No flock frequents thee now. || Thou hast outlived→
Thy popularity, || and art become ||
(Unless verse rescue thee awhile) || a thing→

× ×
Forgot|ten, || as | the foliage of thy youth.[3]

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[1] *The Task*, Book II, ll. 58 ff., *Poems*, p. 267.
[2] *The Task*, Book I, ll. 181 ff., *Poems*, p. 253.
[3] *Yardley Oak*, *Poems*, p. 481.

With Cowper ends the unbroken and unmixed Miltonic tradition. Signs of wider influence are heard even in his blank verse, and with Wordsworth and Coleridge a definitely new period begins, in the history of blank verse as in other aspects of poetry.

CHAPTER VI

DRAMATIC BLANK VERSE FROM THE RE-OPENING OF THE THEATRES TO THE END OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

ALTHOUGH the art of writing dramatic blank verse seemed to be lost with the Carolines, its practice never ceased. But the history of this great metre in the drama, for the century and a half which followed the reopening of the theatres, is a dreary chronicle of mediocrity and worse. What is important and interesting is the persistence and volume with which blank verse continued to be written, and written for the stage. In spite of the vogue, brief but furious, of heroic drama in couplets, and the long and profitable business of prose comedy from Wycherley to Sheridan, there was hardly a dramatist, after the first Restoration period, who, though his main work was comedy, did not produce at least one inferior play in blank verse, generally a tragedy.

Congreve's *Mourning Bride* is a typical example of such left-handed work. The writer of the most brilliant and subtle prose which has ever graced the drama can perpetrate blank verse of this kind:

> This Woman has a Soul
> Of God-like Mould, intrepid and commanding,
> And challenges, in spite of me, my best→
> Esteem ; || to this she's fair, few more can boast
> Of Personal Charms, or with less Vanity
> Might hope to captivate the Hearts of Kings.

But she has Passions which out-strip the Wind,
And tear her Virtues up, as Tempests root→
The Sea. ‖ [1]

This is quite typical blank verse of the period, veering between the two extremes of severe endstopping and ugly and pointless overrunning. Enjambement like that from lines two and eight, which brings a pause very near to the beginning of the line, is very disturbing, and seldom successful. Here it is quite unjustified.

But such plays were acted, being thus distinguished from the blank verse dramas of the nineteenth century, and they kept alive a type of blank verse technique quite distinct from the tradition prevailing in the non-dramatic form of the metre during the same period. The blank verse of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was, in general, fundamentally imitative, but while Thomson, Akenside, and Cowper imitated Milton, the dramatists modelled their technique on that of Shakespeare and his followers in the drama. And a wretchedly poor success, on the whole, they made of it: it may safely be said that the eighteenth century drama contributed absolutely nothing to the technique and scope of our greatest metre.

It was fashionable, about the turn of the century, to diversify prose comedy with occasional passages of blank verse, and many, even of the ugliest and least artistic type, ran into verse for their more heated passages. This habit, which was responsible for some of the worst English ever dignified by the guise of blank verse, is well illustrated in the work of Mrs. Aphra Behn and Mrs. Centlivre. Both these ladies wrote, as well as their more characteristic work in comedy, tragedies almost entirely in blank verse, diversified by passages of prose, sometimes printed as verse. The verse passages, even when continuous, are bad on the whole, and very uneven, a mixture of dull regular lines, chaotic irregular lines, and occasional respectably expressive lines:

[1] *The Mourning Bride*, Act III, Sc. i, *Works*, Vol. II, pp. 212–13.

If that wou'd kill, I'd weary out my Tongue
With an eternal repetition of thy Treachery;—
Nay, and it shou'd forget all other Language,
But Traitor! Card|inal! || which | I wou'd repeat,
Till I had made my|self as raging mad,
As the wild Sea, when all the Winds are up;
And in that Storm, I might forget my Grief.[1]

In the verse portions of the comedies, the same ranting, hysterical tone prevails; the lumps of undigested prose, like line five below, occur with more bewildering frequency, and many of the best lines are embedded in prose. The metrical features of the following passage from Mrs. Centlivre's *Perjured Husband* show the influence of Mrs. Behn; there are the same clumsy substitutions, the extended lines, and the shortened lines, whose juxtaposition produces chaos:

Where art thou now, *Aurelia*?
How wilt thou 'scape that dreadful Precipice,
On which thou art hurried on by thy fatal Passion?
With conscious Horror I deceiv'd *Alonzo*;
I hate this base Treachery, but 'twas unavoidable:
The Truth had been more fatal—
More fatal!—No—For I must never wed
My dear *Bassano*, whilst *Alonzo* lives.[2]

Dryden gave his authority to this practice by turning into blank verse the more impassioned and delicate parts of *The Spanish Friar* and *Marriage à la Mode*. His verse in such passages varies from the measured prose with which the following opens to something graceful and fluent and truly poetic, as in the closing lines, but it seldom has much life:

Alas, I had not render'd up my heart,
Had he not lov'd me first: but he prefer'd me
Above the Maidens of my age and rank;
Still shun'd their compan|y, || and | still sought mine;
I was not won by gifts, yet still he gave;
And all his gifts, though small, yet spoke his love.
He pick'd the earliest Strawberries in Woods,

[1] *Abdelazar*, Act V, Sc. iii, *Works*, Vol. II, p. 92.
[2] *The Perjur'd Husband*, Act III, Sc. i, *Works*, Vol. I, p. 32.

The cluster'd Fil|berds, || and | the purple Grapes:
He taught a prating Stare to speak my name;
And when he found a Nest of Nightingales,
Or callow Linnets, he would show 'em me,
And let me take 'em out.[1]

Although the inspiration here is palpably Elizabethan, there is little trace of Shakespeare in it. It is more reminiscent of Ben Jonson, with whom we should expect Dryden to have stronger sympathy, or of some passages of Beaumont. We see also, in several places, the tendency towards the balanced half-lines of couplet technique and in lines 4 and 8 there is the pyrrhic middle foot, making the antithesis more marked, a special feature of Dryden's handling of the couplet, and of Pope's after him.

But there is no greater proof of Dryden's versatility and genius than his success with purely blank verse tragedy. Only an artist of a very high order could have turned, with the measured and rhetorical clang of *The Conquest of Granada* ringing in his brain, to write, without any confusion of technique, a noble tragedy in a different metre, based on the same line unit, a metre which was, moreover, never wholly to his taste. *All for Love* should not be read immediately after its great prototype, but it is a fine play, the last really great acting tragedy in blank verse. Here Dryden's model is quite obviously Shakespeare, the Shakespeare of *Antony and Cleopatra* itself; and it may be worth while, in order to compare his achievement with that of his master, to quote a passage of similar purport to Cleopatra's speech given on page 70:

No: || you shall go: Your Int'rest calls you hence;
Yes: || your | dear int|erest pulls | too strong, || for these→
Weak Armes | to hold | you here:
Go; || leave | me, soldier;
For you're | no more a Lover: leave | me dying:
Push me | all pale | and panting from | your bosome,

[1] *Marriage a-la-Mode*, Act III, Sc. i, p. 39.

And, when your March begins, || let one | run after
Breathless almost for Joy ; || and cry, || She's dead : [1]

The difference can very easily be felt, though it is hard to analyse. The peculiar thrill or vibration is absent from the later passage ; the impression of combined passion and scorn is weaker. We miss the note of spirituality, which is the hall-mark of the great Elizabethan blank verse. And yet Dryden's rhythm has variety and flexibility ; pause is used skilfully, and the modulations are expressive, at least in that they bring emphasis where it is due. Their lesser effectiveness may often be due to their greater obviousness, such as the device of isolation by pause unusually near the beginning or end of a line, seen at the beginning of the first two lines, and the end of the last. The frequent spondees, straining after dignity, achieve only stridency. The daring overflow from line 2 to 3, where the line-end separates two adjectives which are bound to the same noun, is one for which Dryden would not easily have found warrant in Shakespeare, and it is not very successful. But in lines 6 and 7 the pauses, and the overflow from a bacchius to a trochee, are well contrived to produce the ' breathless ' effect. Dryden shows also a masterly hand with the play of rapid conversation, breaking the lines, but never destroying their unity :

Antony. Well, Madam, we are met.
Cleopatra. Is this a meeting ?
Then, we must part ?
Antony. We must.
Cleopatra. Who sayes we must ?
Antony. Our own hard fates.
Cleopatra. We make those Fates ourselves.[2]

Here the metre, the sense of poetry, imposes itself on the clipped and apparently commonplace diction, giving the impression of immense reserves of feeling and significance behind the words themselves.

[1] *All for Love*, Act II, p. 28.
[2] *All for Love*, Act II, p. 23.

Of the rather pitiful group of dramatists who tried to uphold the dignity of blank verse tragedy during Dryden's time and after, we remember only Lee, Otway, Southerne, and Rowe. For the most part, they were dull and respectable versifiers, not remarkable for disorderliness, but certainly little distinguished for beauty or power. One notable point, almost without exception, is that they can make their verse tolerably effective only in set speeches and designedly purple patches; they are quite incapable of maintaining the impression of poetry in quick conversation, and for the ordinary business of the action.

Lee's blank verse is chiefly remarkable for having considerably fewer lines with double ending than that of most of his contemporaries, and for an apparently irresistible tendency to break out in rhyme. Where the verse remains blank, overrunning of a clumsy and sprawling kind is very rife, and the phrases, whether in spite of, or because of, monotonous iambic regularity, it is hard to say, are so lacking in rhythmic efficiency that it is almost impossible not to lose count of the base:

I'le tell thee Friend, and mark it all ye Princes,
Though never mortal Man arriv'd to such→
A height as I, yet I wou'd forfeit all;
Cast all my Purples, and my conquer'd Crowns,
And dye to Save this Darling of my Soul.
Give me thy Hand, share all my Scepters while→
I live; || and when my hour of Fate is come,
I leave | thee, what | thou mer|itest more | than I, || the World.[1]

The insipid Alexandrine with which the speech ends is all the worse for having a pause where the line is expected to end, and adds to the general confusion of the line-units.

Otway has much more life and vigour, though of a rather ranting kind. The movement of his verse is often quick and impassioned, and overflow is rather better managed than is customary with most of his contemporaries:

I know it, thou wilt kill me.
Do, || strike thy Sword into this bosom: || Lay me→

[1] *The Rival Queens*, Act II, Sc. i, p. 17.

Dead in the Earth, || and then thou wilt be safe
Murder my Father! || tho his Cruel Nature→
Has persecuted me to my undoing,
Driven me to basest wants; Can I behold him
With smiles of Vengeance, butcher'd in his Age?
The sacred Fountain of my life destroy'd?
And canst thou shed the blood that gave me being?
Nay, be a Traitor too, and sell thy Country;[1]

The effect of this passage, with its range and variety, is rhetorical rather than strictly poetical, and is due not only to skilful use of pause, but to deft play with the different pitch 'curves' of statement, question, exclamation, and command, in longer or shorter periods, with their subordinates, over a generally regular foot rhythm. There is very little denotable modulation, except that of pause and an occasional pyrrhic; the trochees opening lines or phrases are fully effective for emphasis, and especially so is the broken spondee of line 2. Otway is fond of extended and doubly extended last feet, and his metre is often rough and harsh, but its energy pushes through difficulties:

For then, my *Pierre*, I might have cause with pleasure
To play the Hypocrite: Oh! how I could weep
Over | the dy|ing Dot|ard, || and kiss | him too,
In hopes to smother him quite; then, when the time
Was come to pay my Sorrows at his Funeral,[2]

He is also prone, in his vigorous and urgent march, to long phrases, covering two whole lines and more:

Jaffier. Where are we wandring?
Belvidera. To eternal Honour;
To doe a deed shall Chronicle thy name,→
Among the glorious Legends of those few→
That have sav'd sinking Nations: || thy Renown→
Shall be the future Song of all the Virgins,→
Who by thy piety have been preserv'd→
From horrid violation: || Every Street→
Shall be adorn'd with Statues to thy honour, ||

[1] *Venice Preserved*, Act III, Sc. ii, p. 32.
[2] *Venice Preserved*, Act II, Sc. i, pp. 12–13.

× × × /
And at thy feet this great Inscription written, ||
Remember him that prop'd the fall of Venice.[1]

The pyrrhic openings, rare in the verse of the period, help the overflow considerably, and Otway's skill is shown in the resolution into endstopped lines for the close of the passage, even more than in the sweeping enjambement of the earlier lines.

Southerne's verse is thin, with many pyrrhic or very lightly stressed feet, and a hopeless incapability of being anything but endstopped, in spite of some grammatical overflow. He is the least interesting of the four. This is one of his most impassioned speeches:

Thou God ador'd! thou ever-glorious Sun!
If she be yet on Earth, send me a Beam
× \ / /
Of thy | All-see|ing Power to light me to her.
× \
Or if | thy Sister Goddess has preferr'd
× × × \
Her Beaut|y to | the Skies | to be | a Star;
O tell me where she shines, that I may stand
Whole Nights, and gaze upon her.[2]

Johnson speaks of the suavity of Rowe's verse, and suave it is to the point of monotony. *Jane Shore* (1714) is written professedly 'in imitation of Shakespeare's style',[3] as its title-page tells us, but is in reality less Shakespearean in sound than many even inferior imitations. It is in the late Jacobean and Caroline type of blank verse, with far more lines ending in a light syllable than not, but the lines are almost unvaryingly endstopped. Many end in a second paeon:

× / (×) ×
I know he bears a most relig|ious Reverence
× / (×) ×
To his dead Master *Edward's* Roy|al Memory.[4]

Very often a monosyllabic word without stress ends the line, and extension is then more noticeable than when the last syllable of a longer word outruns the normal foot. The

[1] *Venice Preserved*, Act IV, Sc. i, p. 42.
[2] *Oroonoko*, Act II, Sc. ii, p. 23.
[3] *Jane Shore*, Title-page. [4] *Jane Shore*, Act I, Sc. i, p. 3.

rather colourless effect of Rowe's verse is partly due, as in the case of Southerne also, to too many monosyllables, and few long words cutting across the foot divisions:

My Lord, | y'are well | encount|er'd, here | has been
A fair | Petit|ioner | this Morn|ing with us;
Believe | me, she | has won | me much | to pity her;
Alas! | her gent|le Nat|ure was | not made
To buf|fet with | Advers|ity. | I told her,
How worth|ily | her Cause | you had | befriended;
How much | for your | good sake | we meant | to do,
That you | had spoke, | and all | Things shou'd | be well.[1]

In the above passage thirty-one feet of the forty end with the ending of a word, an unusually large proportion, and twenty-three consist of a single word or of monosyllables.

Addison's *Cato* was produced in the year before *Jane Shore*. His dramatic blank verse, like that of his translation from the *Aeneid* (*Milton's Stile Imitated*), sounds like couplet verse baulked of its rhyme. A large proportion of the lines have double ending, but they are monotonously endstopped. Even where the sense runs on the rhythm breaks, and the pitch of rather painfully wrought-up vigour has frequent collapses, as in the last line of the following passage:

Believe me, *Marcus*, 'tis an imp|ious greatness,
And mixt with too much horrour to | be envy'd:
How does the lustre of our fa|ther's actions,
Through the dark cloud of Ills that cover him,
Break out, and burn with more trium|phant brightness!
His sufferings shine, and spread a glor|y round him,
Greatly unfortunate, he fights the cause
Of honour, virtue, liberty, and *Rome*.
His sword ne'er fell but on the guilty head;
Oppression, tyranny, and power usurp'd,
Draw all the vengeance of his arm | upon 'em.[2]

[1] *Jane Shore*, Act III, Sc. i, p. 30.
[2] *Cato*, Act I, Sc. i, ll. 25 ff. *Works*, Vol. II, p. 356.

After Rowe, there was a long period which left scarcely any names to be remembered among tragic dramatists, and although blank verse continued to be written with unabated fertility and perseverance, it is hard to find any which merits notice.

One rather curious phenomenon is the invasion of blank verse by couplet technique. The tendency to middle break may be noticed, for instance, in Hughes's *Siege of Damascus*, but the bisected lines are interspersed with pauseless endstopped lines, and there is occasionally an attempt to give variety by overflow, and in spite of the too spasmodic stops, the verse has some life and dignity:

> Oh! now indeed you boast a noble Title!
> What cou'd your Prophet grant? || a Hireling Slave? ||
> Not ev'n the Mules and Camels which he drove
> Were his to give; || and yet the bold Impostor→
> Has canton'd out the Kingdoms of the Earth,
> In frantick Fits of visionary Power,
> To sooth his Pride, || and bribe his Fellow-Madmen![1]

Fenton in *Mariamne* falls back on the favourite device of Dryden, that of keeping the middle pause and cancelling the end pause, but this, in his case, gives no suggestion of couplet technique, for there is a fluency, an almost Jacobean abandon, about the movement of his verse, which occasionally rises to a fitful beauty, as in Herod's dying speech:

> What minister
> Of this dark realm art thou?— || If 'tis thy post→
> To guide the dead through this disastrous gloom;
> Lead to that mournful mansion, || where the ghosts→
> Of those abide, || whom fatal beauty sent→
> Untimely to the shades! || See! see! she soars!—
> How bright a track she leaves along the sky;
> And looks with pity down!— || Oh see! she rests
> On the soft fleece of yonder purple cloud,
> Where angels fan her with their golden plumes;
> Stay, *Mariamne*, stay!—[2]

Mechanical middle stopping, almost to be called middle-

[1] *Siege of Damascus*, Act I, Sc. ii, pp. 7–8.
[2] *Mariamne*, Act V, Sc. xi, p. 74.

hacking, is destructive of all impression of unity in Martyn's *Timoleon*:

> Ye honour'd Shades, || whose Names are *Corinth*'s Boast ! ||
> Heroes and Patriots, || the Renown of *Greece* ! ||
> Who liv'd with Glory, || and for Freedom dy'd.[1] ||

James Thomson, by far the finest poet of the eighteenth century dramatists, is almost as much a Miltonist in his plays as in *The Seasons*, not so much in similarities of phrase and rhythm, for lines like

> Collected, desperate, distress'd, and sore[2]

are rare, as in missing, like his master, the true dynamic activity of dramatic verse. But his play of *Sophonisba*, damned for many by the disastrous line,

> Oh ! *Sophonisba ! Sophonisba !* oh ![3]

is full of beautiful poetry, sometimes of the utmost delicacy and freshness:

> Hail to the joyous day ! With purple clouds,
> The whole horizon glows. The breezy *Spring*
> Stands loosely-floating on the mountain-top,
> And deals her sweets around. The sun too seems,
> As conscious of my joy, with brighter eye
> To look abroad the world; and all things smile
> Like Sophonisba.[4]

And in rapid narrative he achieves ease without loss of dignity, an effect for which nearly all his close predecessors and contemporaries strove in vain:

> he with a few
> Fled to the mountains. Then, I think, it was
> Hem'd in a circle of impending rocks,
> That all his followers fell, save fifty horse;
> Who, thence escap'd thro' secret paths abrupt,
> Gain'd the *Clupean* plain.[5]

But even that is not the rapidity and the ease of drama.

[1] *Timoleon*, Act II, Sc. ii, p. 23.
[2] *Sophonisba*, Act I, Sc. i, p. 1.
[3] *Sophonisba*, Act III, Sc. ii, p. 29.
[4] *Sophonisba*, Act V, Sc. i, p. 57.
[5] *Sophonisba*, Act I, Sc. i, p. 4.

And equally undramatic are the serious philosophical monologues, which for all their ease, have the rounded fore-ordained architecture of the Miltonic paragraph:

> But, whether thro' your gloomy depths I wander,
> Or on your mountains walk; give me the calm,
> The steady, smiling soul; where wisdom sheds
> Eternal sunshine and eternal joy.
> Then, if misfortune comes, she brings along
> The bravest virtues. And so many great
> Illustrious spirits have convers'd with woe,
> (The pride of adverse fate!) || as are enough→
> To consecrate distress, || and make even death→
> Ambition.[1]

The redoubtable Dodsley reverts, not surprisingly, to the most formal and lifeless of middle-stopped or endstopped manufacture:

> Leave that to me. || Sifroy, full well I know,
> Will soon arrive. || Thou, when the gloom of night→
> Shall cast a veil upon the deeds of men, ||
> Trace Paulet's steps, || and in his bosom plunge→
> Thy dagger's point; || thus shall thy care prevent→
> His future babbling; || and to prove the deed→
> Upon Sifroy, be mine. ||[2]

But there is an unexpected oasis, a successful use of extremely broken and fragmentary phraseology for the tender ravings of Cleone, distracted on finding her child dead:

> Hark! hark! lie still, my love!—O for the world→
> Don't stir!— || 'Tis Glanville, and he'll murder us!
> Stay, stay!—I'll cover thee with boughs—don't fear—
> I'll call the little lambs, || and they shall bring→
> Their softest fleece to shelter thee from cold. ||
> There, there—lie close—he shall not see—no, no;
> I'll tell him 'tis an angel I have hid.[3]

The habits of couplet technique are seen in the play which has remained, as it apparently was at the time, and that for no very obvious reason, the best-known tragedy of the century, Home's *Douglas*, though indeed all that is

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[1] *Sophonisba*, Act I, Sc. iv, pp. 11–12.
[2] *Cleone*, Act I, Sc. vii, p. 19.
[3] *Cleone*, Act III, Sc. viii, p. 51.

generally known of it is the erroneous statement of one of its characters :

> My name is Norval ; || on the Grampian hills→
> My father feeds his flocks ; [1]

The opening is a typical one ; Home's favourite gambit is the half line with a strong pause, often followed, in the manner of Dryden, by a series of overrunning lines with middle-pause. At times he can be fairly vigorous, varied, and even impressive :

> No. It was dark December : || wind and rain→
> Had beat all night. || Across the Carron lay→
> The destin'd road ; || and in its swelling flood→
> My faithful servant perish'd with my child.
> O hapless son ! || of a most hapless sire !— ||
> But they are both at rest : || and I alone→
> Dwell in this world of woe, || condemn'd to walk,
> Like a guilt-troubl'd ghost, my painful rounds : [2]

The hereditary enemy of the Douglas was also celebrated in drama, by Miss Hannah More, and a few lines of her *Percy*, with their dreadful regularity and punctilious end-stopping, will serve to represent the general level of dullness in the late eighteenth century. We cannot have much sympathy for a heroine who laments her supposedly dead partner in these terms :

> Shall I not weep ? and have I then no cause ?
> If I could break th'eternal bands of death,
> And wrench the sceptre from his iron grasp ;
> If I could bid the yawning sepulchre
> Restore to life its long-committed dust ;
> If I could teach the slaughtering hand of war,
> To give me back my dear, my murder'd Percy,
> Then I indeed might once more cease to weep.[3]

The best blank verse at the end of this hard-dying tradition is to be found in a rather unexpected quarter. Richard Cumberland, a writer of creditable prose comedies, produced, in the manner of his predecessors a century earlier, a serious blank-verse drama, *The Carmelite*, in which the

[1] *Douglas*, Act II, p. 20. [2] *Douglas*, Act I, p. 15.
[3] *Percy*, Act III, Sc. i, *Works*, Vol. II, p. 195.

metre is nearly all good, expressive, and lively, though betraying its ancestry almost to the point of plagiarism. This apostrophe to a sea storm, very pointedly, if but feebly, echoes Lear's famous invitation to the hurricane:

> Rise, rise, ye waves! blow from all points, ye winds,
> And whelm th' accursed plank that wafts him over
> In fathomless perdition! [1]

And in other storm descriptions we are forcibly reminded of *The Tempest*, but the lines sound as though they might be spoken with conviction, and verse which can even remind us of Shakespeare is welcome in the wilderness of the eighteenth century theatre:

> A noble vessel breaks upon the rocks,
> That jut from old Dunnose's rugged base;
> And as the floating fragments drive ashore
> Our plund'ring islanders (convert their hearts,
> Holy St. Michael) dash the drowning wretches
> From the poor wreck they cling to, and engulph them
> Quick in the boiling waves; by Heav'n that made me
> I cou'd forswear my nature, when I see
> Man so degenerate! [2]

With this vivid though imitative passage a brief record of the least glorious phase of blank verse may aptly close.

[1] *The Carmelite*, Act I, Sc. i, p. 14.
[2] *The Carmelite*, Act I, Sc. i, p. 2.

CHAPTER VII

BLANK VERSE IN THE NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURIES

THE blank verse of Coleridge is quite different from the two varieties which may be broadly distinguished as the Elizabethan and the Miltonic. Once he had broken the Miltonic tradition, the characteristic movement which had pervaded all eighteenth century blank verse hardly reappeared at all in the work of those who followed him. But the less emphatic, more adaptable Elizabethan mode was not so completely lost.

Coleridge cannot be thought of, however, as having founded a school, or established a new major type of blank verse. There are, it is true, very few passages of Cowper's blank verse which could be mistaken for his work or Wordsworth's, still less for that of Keats or Tennyson. But it would be equally impossible to confuse the individual styles of the nineteenth century poets themselves. There is far more difference between the blank verse of Shelley and Tennyson and Browning than between that of Beaumont and Ford and Webster. And yet technical differences are perhaps not so great. The nineteenth century brought forth far more artists of individual genius than the seventeenth. It was an age when great attention was given to technique. But the greatest artist obtains his effects with quite ordinary materials. Shakespeare, as we saw, was a workman very modest in his requirements, and it is not when Milton forces on our ear his daring contortions of rhythm that we praise him most. By the time that a

metre has been in use for three hundred years the limits of its effective modulations will have been fairly widely explored. So among the nineteenth century poets we find little that is definitely new, and the task of tracing back an original effect to a new combination of familiar usages is one of the most stimulating, if the least easy, of a prosodist's duties.

Coleridge's technique is rather more regular than Cowper's, though it gives an impression of greater freedom. Modulations, excepting the opening trochee and the pyrrhic, are rare. These two, however, abound: almost half the lines begin with a trochee, and nearly as many have only four full stresses. A line with a trochaic opening, and a pause after the second foot, which emphasises the chor-iambic movement, is characteristic of Coleridge:

/ × × /
Footless and wild, || like birds of Paradise [1]
/ × × /
Peopled with Death; || or where more hideous Trade [2]

The most interesting fact about Coleridge's blank verse technique, however, is that in the few hundred blank verse lines which he wrote, apart from drama, and most of which were written some years before his friendship with Wordsworth began, he fully anticipates the characteristic movement of Wordsworth's verse, grave, deliberate, constructed in separate self-contained phrases, which do not often contribute to a major rhythmic effect, though often each seems to develope as an afterthought or elaboration of the one before. The last feature is not quite so characteristic of Coleridge as of Wordsworth:

And what if all of animated nature
Be but organic harps diversely framed,
That tremble into thought, as o'er them sweeps
/ × × / / \ × / (×) × /
Plastic and vast, || one intellectual breeze,
At once the Soul of each, and God of all.[3]

---

[1] *The Aeolian Harp, Poetical Works*, p. 49.
[2] *Religious Musings, Poetical Works*, p. 56.
[3] *The Aeolian Harp, Poetical Works*, p. 49.

In the more philosophic passages of the dramas the same resemblance appears, but more faintly, disturbed by frequent trisyllabic feet :

> There exist moments in the life of man,
> When he is nearer the great Soul | of the world
> Than is man's custom, and possesses freely
> The power of questioning his destiny : . .
> And to the dest|iny | of the | next morning
> The spir|it, filled | with anx|ious present|iment,
> Did knit the most removed futurity.[1]

In a passage like the above we see the route by which the Elizabethan versification reached Browning. But there are passages of a more uplifted and musical verse, sustained beyond the power of Wordsworth, which foreshadows Shelley :

> Till Desolation seemed a beautiful thing,
> And all that were and had the Spirit of Life,
> Sang a new song to her who had gone forth,
> Conquering and still to conquer ![2]

As will be seen, Coleridge's verse is quite severely end-stopped. When the major pause is not at the end of a line, it is after the second or third foot, or in the middle of the second, and the end of the line corresponds with some grammatical division of the sentence where a slight pause may be made : closely linked words are not separated.

The blank verse which Wordsworth wrote before he came under the influence of Coleridge is very different from that of *The Prelude* and *Tintern Abbey*. In *The Borderers* a faint and pervasive Elizabethan echo may be heard : there is the not infrequent double ending, and the amphibrach before a pause :

> The vill|ain, Clifford. | He hates | you, and | he knows
> Where he can stab you deepest.[3]
>
> Fear not, | I will | obey you ;— | but One | so young,[4]

[1] *The Piccolomini, Poetical Works*, p. 297.
[2] *Remorse*, Act V, Sc. i, *Poetical Works*, p. 398.
[3] *The Borderers*, Act I, *Poetical Works*, p. 42.
[4] *The Borderers*, Act I, *Poetical Works*, p. 42.

The reader who knew Wordsworth only as the author of the confessional poems would hardly guess that he wrote such lines as these:

> Self-stationed here,
>
> Upon these savage confines, we | have seen you
> Stand like an isthmus 'twixt two stormy seas
>
> That oft have checked their fury at | your bidding.
> 'Mid the deep holds of Solway's mossy waste,
>
> Your single virtue has transformed a Band→
> Of fierce barbar|ians in|to Min|isters→
> Of peace and order.[1]

In this early verse the paragraphing is often better than in *The Prelude*, where the effect is breathless, in spite of a good deal of endstopping. The beauties of *The Prelude* are accidental, single lines or couplets of such marvellous power that one wonders why, having written them, Wordsworth did not lay down his pen for ever:

> The marble index of a mind for ever
> Voyag|ing through | strange seas | of Thought, alone.[2]

Though there is a good deal of endstopping, Wordsworth seldom gives us the final pause where a natural musical section would harmoniously end:

> if, in this time
> Of dereliction and dismay, || I yet
> Despair not of our nature, || but retain
> A more than Roman confidence, || a faith
> That fails not, in all sorrow my support, ||
> The blessing of my life; || the gift is yours,
> Ye winds and sounding cataracts! || 'tis yours,
> Ye mountains! || thine, O Nature! || Thou hast fed
> My lofty speculations; || and in thee
> For this uneasy heart of ours, || I find
> A never-failing principle of joy
> And purest passion.[3]

We are quite ready for a rest at the end of the fifth line, where the pause coincides with the line-ending, but we are

[1] *The Borderers*, Act II, *Poetical Works*, p. 48.
[2] *The Prelude*, Book III, *Poetical Works*, p. 650.
[3] *The Prelude*, Book II, *Poetical Works*, p. 648.

not allowed to delay there, on account of the appositional phrase which occupies half of the next line, and even there we cannot make a long or final pause; there is no fall in pitch, because of the grammatical incompleteness of the sentence, the whole so far being a conditional clause. The next four words,

the gift is yours,

complete the sentence and the voice sinks naturally to a pause, but we are at once hurried away on a long list of apostrophes, and when again the line-ending coincides with a natural pause, at the eleventh line, still another uncomfortable and rhythmically unnecessary addition is made, and the paragraph ends after all in the middle of a line. Another blemish is the frequency of the rather obtrusive break near the end of the line. But Wordsworth can do better than this, and be equally himself. In the earlier parts of *The Prelude* there are excellently moulded paragraphs, with sufficient real pauses, and with long and variously shaped phrases, not repeating the same grammatical pattern:

Yes, I remember when the changeful earth,
And twice five summers on my mind had stamped→
The faces of the moving year, || even then→
I held unconscious intercourse with beauty→
Old as creat|ion, || drink|ing in a pure→
Organic pleasure from the silver wreaths→
Of curling mist, || or from the level plain→
Of wat|ers || col|oured by impending clouds.[1]

Byron's dramatic blank verse is execrable. He had no feeling for the line as a rhythmic unit. Overflow of the most awkward kind, from pronoun to verb, preposition to noun, is allowed. All possible foot-modulations are piled pell-mell into a single line, and the result is chaos:

[1] *The Prelude*, Book I, *Poetical Works*, p. 640.

Oh thou beautiful
And unimaginable ether! || and→
Ye multiplying masses of increased
And still increasing lights! What are ye? || what→
/ / × × × × / × × ×
Is this | blue wild|erness | of inter|minable→
Air, || where ye roll along, as I have seen
The leaves along the limpid streams of Eden?
Is your course measured for ye? Or do ye→
Sweep on in your unbounded revelry
Through an aërial universe of endless→
× × / × / /
Expans|ion—at | which my | soul aches | to think—
Intoxicated with eternity? [1]

All the more surprising, in view of the masses of such metrical rubbish which Byron wrote, are his two short blank-verse rhapsodies, *Darkness* and *The Dream*. The latter especially is a very sound piece of metrical art, and contains lines which suggest the influence of Shelley:

A tablet of unutterable thoughts.[2]

Perhaps nothing in *The Dream* is quite worthy of its beautiful overture,

Our life is twofold: || Sleep hath its own world, ||
A boundary between the things misnamed
Death and existence: [3]

where the thought is launched through two brief phrases, one an intenser repetition of the other, into the long sweep of the second and third lines, but there are fine descriptive and pictorial paragraphs like the following, with its wisely disposed pauses and effective choriambic close:

There was a mass of many images→
Crowded like waves upon me, but he was→
A part of all; || and in the last he lay→
Reposing from the noontide sultriness,
Couch'd among fallen columns, || in the shade→
Of ruin'd walls that had survived the names→
Of those who rear'd them; || by his sleeping side→
Stood camels grazing, and some goodly steeds→
Were fasten'd near a fountain; || and a man
Clad in a flowing garb did watch the while ||
/ × × /
While many of his tribe slumber'd around: [4]

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[1] *Cain*, Act II, Sc. i, *Poetical Works*, p. 521.
[2] *The Dream*, *Poetical Works*, p. 91.
[3] *The Dream*, *Poetical Works*, p. 90.
[4] *The Dream*, *Poetical Works*, p. 91.

The skill here seems to consist in the gradual strengthening of the line breaks till absolute overflow developes into end-stopping.

Of all the Romantics Shelley was most completely master of the music of blank verse. His winged lines move with the strength and precision of bird-flight, and give an impression of complete ease and freedom, though they are habitually endstopped. The occasional overrunning is unforced and unobtrusive, and many lines which are endstopped have a major pause about the middle. The following passage shews how differently from Wordsworth, and how effectively, Shelley can deal with a passage of apostrophe and amplification :

> From all the blasts of heaven thou hast descended : ‖
> Yes, ‖ like a spirit, ‖ like a thought, ‖ which makes→
> Unwonted tears throng to the horny eyes,
> × / ×× × /
> And beatings haunt the des|ola|ted heart,
> Which should have learnt repose : ‖ thou hast descended
> Cradled in tempests ; thou dost wake, O Spring !
> O child of many winds ! ‖ As suddenly→
> Thou comest as the memory of a dream,
> Which now is sad because it hath been sweet ;
> Like genius, or like joy which riseth up→
> As from the earth, clothing with golden clouds,
> The desert of our life. ‖ [1]

The variety of phrase lengths is quite remarkable. At the end of the fourth line, where a pause might be expected, Shelley manages to uphold the rhythm, one would say by means of a pyrrhic, were it not that the pyrrhic occurs in the same place twice in the Wordsworth passage in which amplification is not made acceptable.

The characteristic line of Wordsworth and Coleridge, unmodulated save for a single pyrrhic, is less common with Shelley, excepting when the line ends with a polysyllabic adjective and a monosyllabic noun. The adjective is usually a negative compound with *in-* or *un-*, and has only one stress :

[1] *Prometheus Unbound*, Act II, Sc. i, *Poetical Works*, p. 223.

Mother of this unfathomable World [1]

High over the immeasurable main [2]

Such lines abound in *Alastor*. A trifle less individual are those lines in which the adjective, though still a negative compound, is doubly stressed, like Wordsworth's favourite *intellectual* and *universal*:

The loftiest star of unascended heaven [3]

And slain amid men's unreclaiming tears [4]

Spondaic openings are almost as common as trochaic. The following are among the ten which occur on a chance opened page of *Hellas*:

O spir|it of my sires! is it not come? [5]

One God | is God—Mahomet is His prophet [6]

Wakes earthquake to consume and overwhelm [7]

The verse of *Hellas* and *Prometheus* has very few of the normal technical and rhetorical devices of drama, as from their lyrical rather than dramatic nature might be expected. But that of *The Cenci* has hardly more. Even the most impassioned speech is mainly in endstopped lines, though much broken:

How comes this hair undone?
Its wandering strings must be what blind me so,
And yet I tied it fast.—O, horrible!
The pavement sinks under my feet! The walls→
Spin round! I see a woman weeping there,
And standing calm and motionless, whilst I→
Slide giddily as the world reels. . . . My God! [8]

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[1] *Alastor, Poetical Works*, p. 15.
[2] *Alastor, Poetical Works*, p. 21.
[3] *Prometheus Unbound*, Act III, Sc. iv, *Poetical Works*, p. 249.
[4] *Prometheus Unbound*, Act III, Sc. iv, *Poetical Works*, p. 249.
[5] *Hellas, Poetical Works*, p. 454.
[6] *Hellas, Poetical Works*, p. 454.
[7] *Hellas, Poetical Works*, p. 454.
[8] *The Cenci*, Act III, Sc. i, *Poetical Works*, p. 293.

The verse of *Hyperion* is beautiful in almost unbroken calm, heavy and sad in movement even when the theme is jubilant:

> There must be Gods thrown down, and trumpets blown
> Of triumph calm, and hymns of festival
> Upon the gold clouds metropolitan,
> Voices of soft proclaim, and silver stir
> Of strings in hollow shells:[1]

As in the above passage, even where the main pause is in the middle of a line, there is generally a minor pause at the end. The internal pauses are nearly always after the second or third foot, and the most characteristic overflow is from a spondee, which prevents any suggestion of haste or fluency:

> × × / /
> and a few stars→
> Were lingering in the heavens,[2]
>
> × × / /
> and his bright tears→
> Went trickling down the golden bow he held[3]
>
> Soon wild commotion shook him and made flush
> All the immortal fairness of his limbs.[4]

The spondee always falls with special beauty from Keats's pen, and has some connection with the characteristic enchanted stillness of his imagery:

> / / / / × ×
> Those green-|rob'd sen|ators | of mighty woods,
> / / / /
> Tall oaks, | branch-charm|ed by the earnest stars,
> / × / / / /
> Dream, || and so dream | all night | without a stir,[5]

Keats preserves the Miltonic inconsistency in the pronunciation of those syllables which, according to Milton's

[1] *Hyperion*, Bk. I, ll. 137 ff., *Poems*, p. 210.
[2] *Hyperion*, Bk. III, ll. 36–7, *Poems*, p. 225.
[3] *Hyperion*, Bk. III, ll. 42–3, *Poems*, p. 225.
[4] *Hyperion*, Bk. III, ll. 124–5, *Poems*, p. 226.
[5] *Hyperion*, Bk. I, ll. 73–75, *Poems*, p. 208.

usage, might be elided, and the same word may be differently distributed in consecutive lines:

But those | to whom | the mis|eries of | the world
Are mis|ery | and will | not let | them rest.[1]

But the lingering persistence thus given to the word in the second line is in keeping with the thought. In the same way Keats sometimes adopts the Elizabethan, and sometimes the modern reading of words ending in 'ed', 'iance', 'ion', and so on; but archaisms of this kind

Sole priest|ess of | this des|olat|ion.[2]

and Miltonisms of construction:

purge off
Benign, if so it please thee, my mind's film.[3]

are much more common in the second than in the first version of the poem, and represent a decline from the work of Keats's real genius, which is absolutely individual, grave though not monotonous in movement, much less fluent than his early heroic couplet, but with a tendency to long paragraphs of continuous rhythmic elevation, in spite of much endstopping. The opening paragraph is typical:

Deep in the shady sadness of a vale
Far sunken from the healthy breath of morn,
Far from the fiery noon, and eve's one star,
Sat gray-hair'd Saturn, quiet as a stone,
Still as the silence round about his lair;
Forest on forest hung about his head
Like cloud on cloud. No stir of air was there,
Not so much life as on a summer's day
Robs not one light seed from the feather'd grass,
But where the dead leaf fell, there did it rest.[4]

Tennyson used blank verse with more variety than most of his contemporaries and predecessors. He was always

[1] *The Fall of Hyperion*, ll. 148–9, *Poems*, p. 232.
[2] *The Fall of Hyperion*, l. 227, *Poems*, p. 234.
[3] *The Fall of Hyperion*, ll. 145–6, *Poems*, p. 232.
[4] *Hyperion*, Book I, ll. 1 ff., *Poems*, p. 207.

alert to modify his prosody for the representation of mood. The lines of *Lucretius*, for example, are broken and hurried, with an unusual number of anapaests and tribrachs:

Rushing; || and once | the flash | of a thund|erbolt [1]

A ri|otous con|fluence | of wat|ercourses

Blanching | and bill|owing | in a hol|low of it,[2]

Ruin|ing along | the illim|itable | inane,[3]

In *Ulysses*, on the other hand, the short periods and regular prosody express the deliberation, and the failing strength, of old age:

Death closes all: || but something ere the end, ||

Some work of noble note, || may yet be done, || [4]

and modulation helps in the special pictorial and descriptive effects:

The long | day wanes: | the slow | moon climbs: | the deep

Moans round | with many voices.[5]

The staple of the verse in the long poems is fairly regular, with a good deal of endstopping, but with frequent overflow after a pause near the end of the line:

There likewise I beheld Excalibur
Before him at his crowning borne, || the sword→
That rose from out the bosom of the lake,
And Arthur row'd across and took it— || rich→
With jewels, elfin Urim, on the hilt,[6]

Overflow from an unbroken line to a short phrase or single word is rare, but is used for special effects:

And near him the sad nuns with each a light→
Stood. || [7]
Walking the cold and starless road of Death→
Uncomforted || [8]

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[1] *Lucretius, Works*, p. 161.
[2] *Lucretius, Works*, p. 161.
[3] *Lucretius, Works*, p. 161.
[4] *Ulysses, Works*, p. 96.
[5] *Ulysses, Works*, p. 96.
[6] *The Coming of Arthur, Works*, p. 313.
[7] *Guinevere, Works*, p. 465.
[8] *Oenone, Works*, p. 43.

Trisyllabic feet of every kind are extremely rare, but trochees after the pause, or at the beginning of the line, account for some of Tennyson's most characteristic effects. Many lines begin with a stressed and often drawn-out monosyllable of resonant quality, whose echo is heard ringing through the rest of the line, inspiritingly or mournfully, according to the nature of its sounds:

Shot like a streamer of the northern morn,[1]

Smote by | the fresh | beam of | the spring|ing east [2]

Gleams that | untrav|ell'd world, whose margin fades [3]

Far on | the ring|ing plains of windy Troy [4]

And often where there is overrunning the second line concerned begins with a trochee, and the first ends in the normal foot with a very strong stress, so that the culmination of the rhythmic period is formed by the two adjacent strong syllables at the line-break:

seeing that the King | must guard→

That which | he rules [5]

Let visions of the night or of the day

Come, || as | they will; [6]

Then o'er it crost the dim|ness of | a cloud→

Floating, | and once the shad|ow of | a bird→

Flying [7]

Tennyson is not notable for any great skill in paragraph structure. At its best the movement of his verse is a limpid and unhindered flow, with sufficient pauses and many accidental beauties of phrase, but with few major

[1] *The Passing of Arthur*, *Works*, p. 471.
[2] *The Passing of Arthur*, *Works*, p. 473.
[3] *Ulysses*, *Works*, p. 95.
[4] *Ulysses*, *Works*, p. 95.
[5] *The Holy Grail*, *Works*, p. 433.
[6] *The Holy Grail*, *Works*, p. 433.
[7] *Pelleas and Ettarre*, *Works*, p. 433.

sections of any evident shapeliness or design. Often his afterthoughts and slowly unfolding periods are no happier than Wordsworth's, for though there is more endstopping, the final pause and resolution are long delayed:

> And spake I not too truly, O my knights?
> Was I too dark a prophet when I said
> To those who went upon the Holy Quest,
> That most of them would follow wandering fires,
> Lost in the quagmire?—lost to me and gone,
> And left me gazing at a barren board,
> And a lean Order—scarce return'd a tithe—
> And out of those to whom the vision came
> My greatest hardly will believe he saw;
> Another hath beheld it afar off,
> And leaving human wrongs to right themselves,
> Cares but to pass into the silent life [1]

It was Browning's task to shape into verse a form of language which is not so much colloquial as the idiom of thought, now slang, now sublime; for simple matters, compressed and telegraphic; for more difficult themes, laboriously unfolding a thought with many convolutions and outbranchings into illustration and parenthesis. His metre must give artistic substance to, and bind into artistic unity, speech as various as

> He's Judas to a tittle, that man is!
> Just such a face! Why, sir, you make amends.
> Lord, I'm not angry! [2]

and

> I knew, I felt, (perception unexpressed,
> Uncomprehended by our narrow thought,
> But somehow felt and known in every shift
> And change | in the spir|it,—nay, in every pore
> Of the bod|y, even,) |—what God | is, || what | we are,
> What life is—how God tastes an in|finite joy
> In in|finite ways— || one everlasting bliss,
> From whom all being emanates, all power
> Proceeds; in whom is life for evermore,
> Yet whom existence in its lowest form
> Includes; [3]

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[1] *The Holy Grail*, *Works*, p. 432.
[2] *Fra Lippo Lippi*, *Poetical Works*, Vol. I, p. 518
[3] *Paracelsus*, V, *Poetical Works*, Vol. I, p. 69.

With Browning the matter is all-important, and the speech-emphasis consequently is unusually strong; it is never weakened or modified by the influence of the base. In the same way we never feel that Browning has altered a word or the order of a sentence to fit the base. His language is not the language of written prose, but neither has it the usual modifications of verse language. The wonder is that the iambic base is preserved, as it nearly always is, a steady undercurrent through all the quick and vivid changes of emphasis and pitch. The sense of the line unit, however, is more often shaken. The unusually vigorous and forcible character of Browning's utterance causes his lines to be often piled up with spondees, like the fifth and sixth lines in the passage above. Two spondees may come together, without sufficient weight of matter to demand the weight of expression:

Spark-like | 'mid un|earthed slope-|side fig|tree-roots [1]

And when a strong pause comes between the two syllables of a spondee, the metre is often badly shaken:

Guisepp|e Cap|onsac|chi : || a | priest— || love,

And love | me ! || Well, || yet people think he did.[2]

The intense excitement which pervades much of Browning's poetry expresses itself, in his earlier blank verse, in multiplicity of trisyllabic feet, as they are seen in the passage from *Paracelsus*, but the verse of *The Ring and the Book* has remarkably few trisyllables, the same vitality expressing itself there in an unwearied continuity of rhythmic flow; paragraphs of a hundred lines or more are accepted without protest. It is not only that the interest holds, but the rhythmic elevation, in some inexplicable way, holds also. We do not ask for a breathing-space until it is granted. Of such a phenomenon space will hardly allow illustration, but the reader may turn, if he will, to the Pope's address

[1] *The Ring and the Book*, I, l. 6, *Poetical Works*, Vol. II, p. 1.
[2] *The Ring and the Book, Pompilia*, ll. 164–5. *Poetical Works*, Vol. II, p. 148.

to Caponsacchi,[1] and ask himself whether there is any place, especially after line 1127,

> Do I smile?
> Nay, Caponsacchi, much I find amiss,

where the glow and enthusiasm increase, at which he is unwilling to yield to the impetuous, ever-renewed onrush of the rhythm.

Browning is full of surprises and oddities of technique. One of these is a very effective variety of blank verse used for some passages of his translation of the *Agamemnon*, where every line has double endings, and the extra syllable is often a strong one:

> It suits not to defile a day | auspicious
> With ill announcing speech: distinct | each god's due:
> And when a messenger with gloom|y visage
> To a city bears a fall'n host's woes— | God ward off![2]

Matthew Arnold's blank verse has little modulation, and is distinguished chiefly by the shortness of the phrases, which end abruptly, not with an impression of passion or excitement, but with a peculiar dry jerk, as though strangled in an attempt at fluency. There is little overflow, no extension of final feet, and the breaks almost always come between the feet. The smoother and milder effect of a break within a foot will be noticed in the fourth line of the following passage:

> And night came down over the solemn waste,
> And the two gazing hosts, || and that sole pair, ||
> And darken'd all; || and a cold fog, || with night,
> Crept from the Ox|us. || Soon | a hum arose, ||
> As of a great assembly loos'd, || and fires→
> Began to twinkle through the fog: || for now→
> Both armies mov'd to camp, || and took their meal: ||
> The Persians took it on the open sand→
> Southward; || the Tartars by the river marge: ||
> And Rustum and his son were left alone.[3]

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[1] *The Ring and the Book, The Pope*, ll. 1095–1212. *Poetical Works*, Vol. II, pp. 231–233.
[2] *The Agamemnon of Aeschylus, Poetical Works*, Vol. II, p. 523.
[3] *Sohrab and Rustum, Poems*, p. 219.

Even in passionate speech he has little fluency:

> Girl! || nimble with thy feet, || not with thy hands! ||
> Curl'd minion, || dancer, || coiner of sweet words! ||
> Fight; || let me hear thy hateful voice no more![1]

In *Merope* Arnold successfully used stychomythia, a rare device in English drama:

> *Chorus.* No certain news if like the rest it run.
> *Merope.* Certain in this, that 'tis uncertain still.
> *Chorus.* What keeps him in Arcadia from return?
> *Merope.* His grandsire and his uncles fear the risk.
> *Chorus.* Of what? it lies with them to make risk none.[2]

On the whole the movement of the verse is ampler and less constrained than that of *Sohrab and Rustum*, and is faintly reminiscent of *Samson Agonistes*, though much more formal:

> To this thou would'st have answer.—Take it: Fly!
> Cut short thy triumph, seeming at its height;
> Fling off thy crown, suppos'd at last secure;
> Forsake this ample, proud Messenian realm;
> To some small, humble, and unnoted strand,
> Some rock more lonely than that Lemnian isle
> Where Philoctetes pin'd, take ship and flee:
> Some solitude more inaccessible→
> Than the ice-bastion'd Caucasian Mount→
>
> Chosen a prison for Prometheus, || climb: ||
> There in unvoic'd oblivion hide thy name.[3]

Swinburne's blank verse in the drama is distinguished, like all his iambic verse, by the abundance of anapaests:

> than serve
> With cer|emon|ies of rit|ual hand | and tongue
> His mere | idol|atrous like|ness.[4]

It is also apt to break very near the ends of lines:

[1] *Sohrab and Rustum, Poems*, p. 209.
[2] *Merope, Poems*, p. 332. [3] *Merope, Poems*, p. 370.
[4] *Mary Stuart*, Act V, Sc. i, p. 193.

Of your love→
We know it is that comes this counsel ; || nor,
Had we such friends of all our servants, || need→
Our mind be now distraught with dangerous doubts.[1]

Such modulation, however, seldom seems to mean very much, and Swinburne has no great dramatic vitality, or skill in quick interchange of conversation, or in varying the character of his verse with different speakers. He is best in long speeches of a quiet or thoughtful tenour, and there shews considerable power of paragraph construction, and an easy and varied, if not always vital and significant, rhythmic movement :

'Tis not so much to look upon the sun
With eyes that may not lead us where we will,
And halt behind the footless flight of hope
With feet that may not follow : nor were aught
So much, of all things life may think to have,
That one not cowardly born should find it worth
The purchase of so base a price as this,
To stand self-shamed as coward. I do not think
This is mine end that comes upon me : but
I had liefer far it were than, were it not,
That ever I should fear it.[2]

The most important aspect of recent blank verse has been the attempt, more or less in the manner of Browning, to fit blank verse to the run of modern speech. This is not always successful, and when Hardy's King George meets his minister with

Yes, yes ; I grasp your reasons, Mr. Pitt,
And grant you audience gladly. . . .
What of the country, eh ? and of the war ?[3]

or Pitt himself says

Pardon this early call. The packet's in,
And brings me this unreadable Dutch paper,
So, as the offices are closed today,
I have brought it round to you—What does it say ?
For God's sake, read it out. You know the tongue.[4]

we are inclined to quarrel with the use of verse at all, or to feel that diplomatic affairs and the commonplaces of

[1] *Mary Stuart*, Act IV, Sc. i, p. 132.
[2] *Mary Stuart*, Act V, Sc. i, p. 189.
[3] *The Dynasts*, Act IV, Sc. i, Vol. I, p. 105.
[4] *The Dynasts*, Act IV, Sc. vi, Vol. I, p. 129

conversation could not sound more unnatural if they were represented in Shakespearean language. The metre does not vitalise or give significance to such diction. When a really deep or moving note is to be sounded, this realism of phrase has to give way to a more traditional poetic idiom and movement:

> Ah, Coll. Lead bullets are not all that wound. . . .
> I have a feeling here of dying fires,
> A sense of much and deep unworded censure,
> Which, compassing about my private life,
> Makes all my public service lustreless
> In my own eyes.—I fear I am much condemned
> For those | dear Nap|les and | Palermo days,
> And her who was the sunshine of them all!
> He who is with himself dissatisfied,
> Though all the world find satisfaction in him,
> Is like a rainbow-coloured bird gone blind
> That gives delight it shares not.[1]

An almost verbal echo of a Wordsworthian line sounds through the third of these, and of a Shakespearean through the last. But, whatever the idiom, the prosody of *The Dynasts* is fairly simple, the characteristic of the verse being that it moves rather heavily, and often slowly, with a good many spondees.

An important phase in contemporary drama is the concern of playwrights with modern, and often with rustic or lower-class, life, to which universal significance is given by poetic representation. The results in prosody have been very interesting. For the effect aimed at, the emotional elevation and significance given by verse cannot be sacrificed, and yet there would be a too flagrant absurdity in the outpouring of polished numbers from the lips of tinkers or farm-labourers. Consequently a type of blank verse has arisen, in which idiomatic and dialect speech-forms are elaborated and emphasised, and modified as little as possible to a very rough approximation to the iambic base. The ordinary modulations, pyrrhic, spondee, and trochee, are

[1] *The Dynasts*, Act II, Sc. i, Vol. I, p. 63.

almost outnumbered by anapaests, amphibrachs, and monosyllabic feet. Two passages of similar tenour, one from a play by Lascelles Abercrombie and one from a play by John Drinkwater, will shew how strong is the common stamp :

Yes : she'ld come,
Like you, ‖ suppose | now, ‖ out | of the wind|y rain ;
She'ld have been tussling with its force against her
Like a | young girl | laugh|ing with | her brother
Because | he plays | mock-ruff|ian ; ‖ and | the game
Would shine | still in | her eyes | as she came in ;
And she'ld | be walk|ing light|ly with | the glee
Would seem | to sing | in her bod|y, ‖ all | so thrilled
From the | wind's pour|ing through | her dress. It would
Be strange to see | her, ‖ a strange | and lovely thing
To see her coming back here after all.[1]

I set
Ever|y sin|ew taut | against | this power, (×)
This sup|ple tor|rent of might | that sudd|enly rose
Out of | the fal|len dusk | and sang | and leapt
Like an | athlete | of the gods | frenzied | with wine
It seemed | to rear | chall|enging | against me. . . .
And I meas|ured myself | against | this brag|ging pride,
Climb|ing step | by step | through the blind|ing riot
Of froz|en flakes | swung on | the cat|aract wind,
My veins | praising | the tyr|anny that | was matched
Against | this poor | ambit|ious bod|y of mine.[2]

The metre of the second passage is so abnormal that in

[1] *The Staircase, Four Short Plays*, pp. 56–57.
[2] *The Storm, Pawns*, p. 13.

reading one is almost compelled to violate the sense by constant end-pause in order to preserve the feeling of blank verse.

Gordon Bottomley uses the same kind of prosody for plays which are intended to give to old legend the realism of common life. He has many lines as difficult to scan as

> Like an after-thought that deceives nobody.[1]

But his idiom is rather different, and less vigorous; a kind of puerile colloquialism is diversified by sudden bursts of poetic adjectives:

> I know not why it is I must be fighting,
> For ever fighting, when the slaying of men
> Is a more weary and aimless thing to me
> Than most men think it . . . and most women too.
> There is a woman here who grieves she loves me,
> And she too must be fighting me for ever
> With her *dim ravenous unsated* mind.[2]

W. B. Yeats has shared in the work of "colloquialising" blank verse, giving a special oracular twist to his Irish idiom, but his prosody is notable for one or two special effects. His lines abound in glide-anapaests, but eschew full anapaests:

> No, not | angel|ical, | but of | the old gods,
> Who wand|er about | the world | to wak|en the heart—
> The pass|ionate, | proud heart | that all | the angels
> Leaving | nine heav|ens empt|y would rock | to sleep.[3]

But even more characteristic is the effect illustrated in the last two lines, the concentration of weight on a spondee, either by a preceding pyrrhic or trochee. Occasionally, in the combination iambus-spondee-trochee, four heavy

[1] *King Lear's Wife, King Lear's Wife and Other Plays*, p. 18.
[2] *The Riding to Lithend, King Lear's Wife and Other Plays*, p. 94.
[3] *The Countess Cathleen, Collected Works*, Vol. III, p. 48.

syllables are brought together, and to this feature may be traced the familiar mournful chant of Yeats's verse:

For life | moves out | of a | red flare | of dreams
Into a common light of common hours,
Until | old age | bring the | red flare | again.[1]

The most surprising idiosyncrasy of modern blank verse prosody appears among the many peculiarities of C. M. Doughty. The verse of *Adam Cast Forth* is, on the whole, quite smooth, dignified and pleasant, mainly endstopped, and faintly Miltonic, perhaps from the associations of its subject, but much quieter. But after a long level passage, the reader comes to a sudden stumbling stop in a line which apparently far outruns the base, till he realises that Doughty allows himself elisions, on the classical principle that any vowel, no matter how important in stress, may be 'counted out' prosodically before another vowel, though the second line below shews that the elision is optional:

I looking in thine eyes, th(ee) (O) Adam(a) I loved!
That gazed *so in*wardly on mine: beheld
Thy form (I), as beaut(y) of palm-stem in th(e) Eden,[2]

[1] *The Land of Heart's Desire*, *Collected Works*, Vol. III, p. 97.
[2] *Adam Cast Forth*, p. 65.

CHAPTER VIII

IAMBIC STANZA FORMS

STANZA composition in English dates back almost to the clumsy beginnings of foot-versification, for the stanza forms were adopted, along with the continental prosody, from France, and it is perhaps hardly surprising to find that the favourite stanzas of the early lyrists were quite long and elaborate ones, and that they were masters of taxing rhyme-schemes long before they had grasped the new principle of rhythm. Complexity always attracts the prentice-hand.

Among the manuscript collections of hymns and love-poems which date back in all probability to the thirteenth century the famous *Alisoun* and 'Lenten is come with Love to Toun' are quite typical in the complexity of their stanza-form, and it is difficult to find any shorter or simpler medium than the following:

mon þt is in ioie & blis & liþ in shame & synne
he is more þen unwis þt þerof nul nout blynne
al þis world hit geþ away
me þynkeþ hit neȝyþ domesday
now man gos to grounde
Ihu Crist þt þolede ded
he may oure soules to hevene led
wiþinne a lutel stounde [1]

But most of the stanzas are separable into simple units, like the above, which consists of a fourteener couplet followed by a pair of four-foot couplets, linked by rhyming three-foot lines.

[1] Harl. MS. 2253, Fol. 79b, Col. 2.

Very common, both for lyric and narrative poetry, is a continuous or partially stanzaic arrangement of four-foot and three-foot lines rhymed *aab ccb ddb*, and so on, the *b*-lines having three feet, and the others four. The triplets are grouped by occasional or regular changes of the *b*-rhyme.

An exception to the prevailing complexity is found in the abundant carols of the period, though few of these approach the matchless simplicity of 'I sing of a maiden', with its couplet verses. The commonest form consists of a triplet of four-foot lines, followed either by a single-line refrain in English:

Ihu as þou art our sauyor
þt þou save us fro dolor — Blyssid be þy name Ihu
Ihu is my paramor[1]

or by a Latin phrase which may vary with each stanza:

Mary is a lady bryȝt
Sche haȝt a sone of moche myȝt — Bona natalicia
Ou[r] al yis word sche is liȝt

Mary is so fayr and sote
& here sone so ful of pote — Bona voluntaria
Ou[r] al this word he is bote[2]

For narrative purposes in the early metrical romances, the stanzas were as long as for lyric, often twelve or sixteen lines, but not often so complex in rhyme-scheme, and nearly always composed of lines of three feet, with sometimes a single disyllabic line, as in the Scottish *Sir Tristrem*:

Tristrem wiþ ysonde rade
Into þe wode oway,
A loghe þai founden made,
Was ful of gamen and play;
Her blis was ful brade,
And ioieful was þat may.
Seuen niȝt þai þare abad
And seþþen to court come þai
'Sir King',
Tristrem gan to say,
'ȝif minstrels oþer þing'.[3]

---

[1] Sloane MS. 2593, Fol. 5b. [2] Sloane MS. 2593, Fol. 8 b.
[3] *Sir Tristrem*, ll. 1915 ff., p. 54.

Certain of the alliterative romances also were given a resemblance to stanzaic form by the device known as the 'bob and wheel', the alliterative lines being grouped in sections varying from about sixteen to more than thirty lines, each section followed by a short line, often consisting of one foot only, and a short rhymed stanza, like the following:

. . . Sich a fole upon folde, ne freke þat hym rydes,
Watȝ neuer sene in þat sale wyth syȝt er þat tyme,
With yȝe;
He loked as layt so lyȝt,
So sayd al þat hym syȝe,
Hit semed as no mon myȝt,
Under his dynttes dryȝe [1]

The stanzas which admit longer lines are kept for lyric, and the lines are clumsily and drearily lengthened out for refrain:

Lutel wot hit anymon
How love hym haveþ ybounde
þat for us oþe rode ron
Ant bohte us wiþ is wounde.
Þe loue of him us haueþ ymaked sounde
Ant ycast þe grimly gost to grounde.
Ref. Euer & oo nyht & day he haueþ us in is þohte
He wil nout leose þat he so deore bohte [2]

These complicated and ungraceful stanza forms for lyric purposes had a vast progeny in the Elizabethan song-books, where even greater variety of line lengths is found, and where two-foot and single-foot lines become common:

Eccho, how well may she that makes me mone
By thy example learne to rue my paine?
Thou hearst my plaints when as I waile alone,
And wailing accents answerest againe
When as my breast through griefe I beat,
That wofull sound thou dost repeate,
When as I sob,
And heartly throb,
A dolefull sobbing sound againe thou sendest:
And when I weepe
And sigh full deepe
A weepy, sighing Voice againe thou lendest [3]

---

[1] *Sir Gawayne and the Green Knight*, ll. 196 ff., p. 7.
[2] Harleian MS. 2253.
[3] *Eclogue, Davison's Poetical Rhapsody*, p. C 6 b.

A stanza of this type has no individual character, and can hardly be handled so as to give any continuous or appreciable impression of mood. It always suggests that the writer composed the first stanza fortuitously as the phrases occurred to him, and spun out others afterwards to correspond. But the analysis into simple elements is still possible, and seldom or never are more than two rhymes interwoven.

The lengthy and elaborate stanza forms waned in importance and lost popularity soon after the greatest of all the major stanzas was discovered, but the stanza only second in importance to the Spenserian had had a continuous history for nearly two hundred years, a model of form and proportion, alongside the shapeless meanderings of lyric.

The stanza called *Rime Royal* was first used by Chaucer, and bears the stamp of his genius. It is the stanza par excellence for story-telling, and the greater part of its history belongs to the great leisurely days of the verse narrative. A seven-lined stanza of five-foot lines, rhymed *ababbcc*, it has amplitude, and at the same time a certain clinching finality given by the final couplet, which keeps the poet in mind of his thread, and generally advances the story one step, after six lines of description or expatiation:

> The dayes honour, and the hevenes yë
> The nightes fo, al this clepe I the sonne
> Gan westren faste, and downward for to wrye,
> As he that hadde his dayes cours y-ronne;
> And whyte thinges wexen dimme and donne
> For lak of light, and sterres for to appere,
> That she and al hir folk in wente y-fere.[1]

It is not too long for a speech, nor too short for a set description or simile. A variant of much less charm is used, with insistent endstopping, for the rambling, rather stupid tale told by the Monk:

> Lordinges, ensample heer-by may ye take
> How that in lordshipe is no sikernesse;
> For whan fortune wol a man forsake,
> She bereth away his regne and his richesse,
> And eek his freendes, bothe more and lesse;

[1] *Troilus and Criseyde*, Book II, *Works*, Vol. II, p. 217.

For what man that hath freendes thorgh fortune,
Mishap wol maken hem enemys, I gesse:
This proverbe is ful sooth and ful commune.[1]

This form later became common for political songs and moral treatises.

After Chaucer the Rime Royal retained for over a century in England and in Scotland a popularity it has never since reached, being the staple stanza of all the Chaucerians, Lydgate, Occleve, Hawes and Barclay in England, and Henryson and Dunbar in Scotland, where it is said to have taken its name from being the metre of *The Kingis Quair*. Most of these writers were at best dull metrists, and at worst may be represented by a stanza from *The Ship of Fools*:

Who euer begynneth any worke or dede
Of byldynge or of other thynge chargeable
And to his costes before taketh no hede
Nor tyme nat countyth to his work agreable
Suche is a fole and well worthy a babyll
For he that is wyse wyll no thynge assay
Without he knowe howe he well ende it may[2]

But the King himself used the metre with a grace that suggests Chaucer's own handling, and Henryson could command at times a barer, more tragic appeal:

'Quhat Lord is ȝone (quod scho), haue ȝe na feill,
Hes doth to vs so greit humanitie?'
'ȝes (quod a Lipper man), I knaw him weill;
Sir Troylus it is, gentill and fre.'
Quhen Cresseid vnderstude that it was he,
Stiffer than steill thair stert ane bitter stound→
Throwout hir hart, and fell doun to the ground.[3]

Like Chaucer he obtains some of his effects by an occasional overrunning line.

The metre was used in the sixteenth century for every kind of writing, from the dullest of political 'songs' to the uncertain but often splendidly inspired hymns of

[1] *The Monkes Tale, Works*, Vol. IV, p. 252.
[2] Barclay, *The Ship of Fools*, p. G 5 a.
[3] *The Testament of Cresseid*, ll. 533 ff., *Poems*, Vol. III, p. 22.

Spenser. But a consideration of these alone seems to indicate that the metre, conceived so finely as the vehicle of chivalric adventure and dream quest, lacks the qualities of a lyric measure. In Spenser's hands at any rate it is too easy, too diffuse, for intensity, and feeling becomes smothered in excess of verbiage. One notices how the appeal scatters at the turn of the stanza:

> Yet O most blessed Spirit, pure lamp of light,
> Eternall spring of grace and wisedome trew,
> Vouchsafe to shed into my barren spright,
> Some little drop of thy celestiall dew,
> That may my rymes with sweet infuse embrew,
> And giue me words equall vnto my thought,
> To tell the marueiles by thy mercie wrought.[1]

Though still heavy and burdened, more suitable for lyric is the four-foot form with the same rhyme scheme used for "Quia Amore Langueo", the fifteenth-century hymn, "Sweet and Benign Moder and May", and many poems in *Tottel's Miscellany:*

> For want of will, in wo I plain:
> Under colour of sobernesse.
> Renewing with my sute my pain,
> My wanhope with your stedfastnesse.
> Awake therefore of gentlenesse.
> Regard at length, I you require,
> My swelting paines of my desire.[2]

Most of the stories in the successive editions of the *Mirrour for Magistrates* are in Rime Royal of varying degrees of accomplishment, from the sombre power of Sackville's *Induction,*

> And not so sone discend into the pit:
> Where death, when he the mortall corps hath slaine,
> With retchlesse hand in grave doth couer it,
> Thereafter neuer to enioye agayne
> The gladsome light, but on the ground ylayne,
> In depth of darknesse waste and weare to nought,
> × / × × ×
> As he had neuer | into | the world bene brought.[3]

---

[1] *An Hymne of Heavenly Love,* ll. 42 ff., *Poetical Works,* p. 593.
[2] *Songes and Sonettes,* p. H 3 b.
[3] *Mirrour for Magistrates,* 1571, p. P 3 a.

to the shaky and staggering metre of *Robert Tresillian*, in which the rhyme scheme is applied to a stanza consisting mostly of mixed Alexandrines and fourteeners:

> In the ru|full reg|ister | of mis|chiefe and | misshap,
> Baldwin | we be|sech the | with our | names to | begin,
> Whom un|frendly | Fortune | did traine | unto | a trap,
> When we | thought our | state | moste stab|le to | haue bin:
> So light|ly lese | they all, | which all | do wene | to winne:
> Learne by | us ye | Laweyers | and Iudg|es of | the Land,
> Upright | and vn|corrupt | in dome | always | to stande.[1]

The metre received the stamp of Shakespeare's choice for narrative in *The Rape of Lucrece*, and in his hands a lyrical fervour is added to its other excellences:

> Faire torch burne out thy light, and lend it not→
> To darken her whose light excelleth thine;
> And die vnhallowed thoughts, before you blot→
> With your vncleannesse, that which is diuine:
> Offer pure incense to so pure a shrine:
> Let faire humanitie abhor the deede,
> That spots and stains loues modest snow-white weed.[2]

But with the Elizabethan age narrative poetry of the mediaeval type decayed, and the Rime Royal soon fell into disuse. One of its latest appearances was in Drayton's legends, where it is used with the old masterly ease and with something of the characteristic Elizabethan spirituality:

> The Larke that learns obseruance to the Sunne,
> Quauers her cleere notes in the quiet ayre,
> That on the riuers murmuring base doth runne,
> And the pleasde heauens, their fairest liuery ware,
> The place such pleasure gently doth prepare;
> The flowers my scent, || the flood my taste to steepe
> Each sence thus sated, || lulled me asleepe[3]

Milton lengthened the last line to an Alexandrine and used the stanza for *The Passion* and the poem *On the Death of a Fair Infant*, adding to its graces by double rhyme:

[1] *Mirrour for Magistrates*, 1571, p. A 3 a.
[2] *The Rape of Lucrece*, p. C 1 b.
[3] *Legend of Robert, Duke of Normandie*, *Poems*, 1605, p. Dd 3 a.

O fairest flower no sooner blown but blasted,
Soft silken Primrose fading timelesslie,
Summers chief honour if thou hadst out-lasted→
Bleak winters force that made thy blossome drie;
For he being amorous on that lovely die→
That did thy cheek envermeil, thought to kiss
But kill'd alas, and then bewayl'd his fatal bliss.[1]

This was the form revived by Chatterton for *An Excelente Balade of Charitie*:

The gatherd storme is rype; the bigge drops falle;
The forswat meadowes smethe, and drenche the raine;
The comyng ghastness do the cattle pall,
And the full flockes are drivynge ore the plaine;
Dashde from the cloudes the waters flott againe;
The welkin opes; the yellow levynne flies;
And the hot fierie smothe in the wild lowings dies.[2]

In the Romantic Revival the Rime Royal was rather severely neglected. Wordsworth made one or two unsuccessful attempts in it, but Keats and Shelley, and the poets who reinstated the Spenserian stanza ignored its predecessor. It remained for William Morris, returning to Chaucer as his master, to restore it to a place of honour as a narrative measure, by using it for several stories in *The Earthly Paradise*. In his hands it has Chaucer's easy leisurely pace, but a more slumberous richness, and less humour and vitality:

But in this day with whom shall he contend?
A maid stood by him like Diana clad
When in the woods she lists her bow to bend,
Too fair for one to look on and be glad,
Who scarcely yet has thirty summers had,
If he must still behold her from afar;
Too fair to let the world live free from war.[3]

The measure has also been used in our own day by John Masefield, both in its pure form in *Dauber* and *The Widow in Bye Street* and with its last line an Alexandrine in *The Daffodil Fields*. Masefield has two quite distinct styles, one

[1] *Poetical Works*, p. 76. [2] *Rowley Poems*, p. 205.
[3] *The Earthly Paradise, Atalanta's Race*, Vol. I, p. 99.

a traditionally poetic one with a very free and musical movement:

Mournful, || and then again mournful, || and still
Out of the night that mighty voice arose;
The Dauber at his foghorn felt the thrill.
Who rode that desolate sea? What forms were those?
Mournful, || from things defeated, || in the throes→
Of memory of some conquered hunting-ground,
Out of the night of death arose the sound.[1]

and another of much more slipshod movement, incorporating all kinds of slang and colloquialism:

'There is a chance,' she cried, 'there always is.
Poor Mr. Gray might rally, might live on.
Oh, I must telegraph to tell him this.
Would it were day still and the message gone.'
She rose, her breath came fast, her gray eyes shone.
She said, 'Come, Lion, see me through the wood.
Michael must know.' Kier sighed. 'Girl, it will do no good.'[2]

A very interesting modern variant is that in which Robert Bridges composed his *Eros and Psyche*. In this the *c*-rhymed couplet comes immediately after the quatrain and the stanza is completed by a line on the suspended *b*-rhyme. The grace of the turn is sacrificed for a less trenchant close, and the *b*-rhyme so long delayed seems to point forward instead of back, leaving a greater sense of expectancy:

But fairest Psyche still in favour rose,
Nor knew the jealous power against her sworn
And more her beauty now surpass't her foe's,
Since 'twas transfigured by the spirit forlorn,
That writeth to the perfecting of grace,
Immortal question in a mortal face,
The vague desire whereunto man is born.[3]

This metre had been used before by James Thomson (B.V.) for his poem *To our Ladies of Death*, and it also forms the principal metre of his *City of Dreadful Night* with the further

[1] *Dauber*, vi. *Collected Poems*, p. 223.
[2] *The Daffodil Fields*, I, *Collected Poems*, p. 262.
[3] *Eros and Psyche*, April 1, *Poetical Works*, Vol. I, p. 86.

variation of double rhyme in the *c*-couplet which is remarkably successful in producing the effect of a desolate wail:

> The moving moon and stars from east to west
> Circle before her in the sea of air;
> Shadows and gleams glide round her solemn rest.
> Her subjects often gaze | up to | her there:
> The strong to drink new strength of iron | endurance,
> The weak new terrors; all renewed | assurance
> And confirmation of the old despair.[1]

This measure Thomson had himself elaborated from Browning's *The Guardian Angel*, which has the double rhymes but in which the last line has the *a*-rhyme, giving a much more complete and serene effect:

> Dear and great Angel, wouldst thou only leave→
> That child, when thou hast done with him, for me!
> Let me sit all day here, that when eve→
> Shall find performed thy special ministry,
> And time come for departure, thou, | suspending→
> Thy flight, mayst see another child | for tending,
> Another still, to quiet and retrieve.[2]

The Rime Royal is remembered now, not as the metre of *Troilus and Criseyde*, but simply as the metre of smooth narrative, and far-heard unpoignant passion. The Spenserian Stanza truly belongs to that poem alone for which Spenser created it. It is the metre of *The Faerie Queene*, and no later poet has been able to make it his own. It seems to us now that with Spenser's time Englishmen lost the power of combining subtlety of imagination with simplicity of heart, the two qualities which form the double key to his Paradise. And so completely does the Spenserian stanza translate and impart the spirit and atmosphere of Spenser's Fairyland that, when other poets use it for poems which try to capture the same mood, their efforts sound like mere imitations, and when they use it for themes of an entirely different character, the clouds of

[1] *The City of Dreadful Night, Poetical Works*, Vol. I, p. 172.
[2] *The Guardian Angel, Poetical Works*, Vol. I, p. 296.

glory which it trails, and a haunting memory of Spenser's cadences, make it unfit for other purposes, and at worst a tragic misfit.

The Rime Royal was too simple and straightforward for Spenser's purposes and other stanzas lacked amplitude. The outstanding characteristic of the Rime Royal is however kept for the Spenserian, the turn of the stanza at the central couplet, with its ever fresh effect of surprise. But the later movement is extended, and the trenchancy of the final couplet is softened, and the whole sinuous progress of the rhymes brought to a leisurely conclusion by the Alexandrine. The Alexandrine is the final stroke of genius, and may give any character to the stanza; it adds the last life-giving brush-stroke to a picture, or gathers up the wisdom of a period of reflection, or sounds, as upon a horn, a blast of melancholy or triumph, or simply launches the narrative one reluctant pace forward. To illustrate the range of the stanza within its enfolding harmony of mood is impossible; the following will serve at least to show its construction:

> Here haue I cause, in men iust blame to find,
> That in their proper prayse too partiall bee,
> And not indifferent to woman kind,
> To whom no share in armes and cheualrie→
> They do impart, ne maken memorie→
> Of their braue gestes and prowesse martiall;
> Scarse do they spare to one or two or three,
> Rowme in their writs; yet the same writing small
> Does all their deeds deface, and dims their glories all.[1]

The immediate progeny of *The Faerie Queene* was a host, not of imitations, but of adaptations and variants, of which the most famous and poetical and Spenserian in tone were the inventions of Giles and Phineas Fletcher. These all keep the three rhymes and the final Alexandrine, but many are abbreviations and simplifications of Spenser's form, many omit the turn on the *b*-rhyme, and all end with a triplet. A few examples follow:

> A A child he was, and had not learn't to speake,
> B That with his word the world before did make,

[1] *The Faerie Queene*, Book III, Canto II, *Poetical Works*, p. 148.

A His Mothers armes him bore, he was so weake,
B That with one hand the vaults of heav'n could shake,
B See how small roome my infant Lord doth take,
C Whom all the world is not enough to hold.
C Who of his yeares, or of his age hath told?
C Never | such age | so young, | never | a child | so old.[1]

A Speake to her, boy. Love is more dumbe than blinde.
B She must be woo'd: Love's tongue is in the eyes.
A Speech is Love's dart. Silence best speaks the minde.
A Hir eye invites. Thence love and death I finde.
B Hir smiles speake peace. Stormes breed in smiling skies
B Who silent loves? Whom speech all hope denies.
C Why should'st thou fear? To Love Fear's near akinne.
C Well, if my cunning fail not, by a gin
C (Spite of her scorn, thy fear) I'le make thee woo, and winne[2]

A The cheerfull Lark, mounting from early bed,
B With sweet salutes awakes the drowsie light;
A The earth she left, and up to heav'n is fled;
B There chants her Makers praises out of sight:
C Earth seems a molehill, men but ants to be;
C Teaching proud men, that soar to high degree,
C The farther up they climbe, the lesse they seem, and see.[3]

But Spenser's genius soon underwent an eclipse, and it must have been a critical atmosphere totally deaf to his magic that could accept, just before the Spenser revival of the eighteenth century, a forgery entitled *An original Canto of Spenser, Design'd as Part of his Fairy Queen but never Printed.* The perpetrator of this, Samuel Croxall, who wrote as Nestor Ironside, expected his readers to believe that Spenser wrote the line:

Those *Bull-dogs* stout of goodly *British* Breed[4]

and others equally absurd, and the following is a fair sample of his concoction:

In this sad Plight behold fair *Britomart*,
Alas! we must awhile with-holden see
By that false *Archimago's* cunning Art,
By whom fair *Una* could misleaden be;

---

[1] *Christ's Victory*, p. 23 (Giles Fletcher).
[2] *Piscatorie Eclogue*, V, *The Purple Island*, etc., p. 31 (Phineas Fletcher).
[3] *The Purple Island*, Canto XI, p. 122 (Phineas Fletcher).
[4] *An Original Canto*, p. 16.

In vile Enchantments all excelled He,
And whosoever dar'd him to oppose,
Soon fell, or swiftly did before him flee;
Or else to them he gave a magick Dose,
By which they calmly slept, and never more arose.[1]

Of the eighteenth century poets who rediscovered Spenser the truest disciple, as well as the earliest at work, was James Thomson. Though he was completely ignorant of the character of the language which Spenser used, to the point of remarking naïvely that the prefix 'y' and the suffix '-en' are used to lengthen the words to which they are applied, apparently merely for convenience of metrical composition, his ear was attuned to Spenser's music, and he employs his misunderstood archaisms quite effectively. In the descriptive passages at the beginning of *The Castle of Idolence* we seem to hear Spenser himself:

Was nought around but Images of Rest:
Sleep-soothing Groves, and quiet Lawns between;
And flowery Beds that slumberous Influence kest,
From Poppies breath'd; and Beds of pleasant Green,
Where never yet was creeping Creature seen,
Mean time unnumber'd glittering Streamlets play'd,
And hurled every-where their Waters sheen;
That, as they bicker'd through the sunny Glade,
Though restless still themselves, a lulling Murmur made.[2]

William Shenstone, who actually preceded Thomson in date of publication, was led, by the nature of his subject, to parody rather than serious discipleship, but through his quiet fun we often catch an echo of Spenser's musical leisurely tones:

But see, the Hour of Pleasaunce draweth near,
And forth they usher debonnair and gay,
And, standing on the Green, with jocund Leer,
Salute the Stranger passing on his Way:
Some builden fragile Tenements of Clay:
Some to the standing Lake their Courses bend,
With Pebbles smooth at *Duck and Drake* to play
Thilk to the Huxter's sav'ry Cottage tend,
In Pastry Kings and Queens th' allotted Mite to spend.[3]

[1] *An Original Canto*, p. 8.
[2] *The Castle of Indolence*, Canto I, p. 2.
[3] *The Schoolmistress*, p. B 1 a.

James Beattie, the author of *The Minstrel*, worked with much more uncertain touch, and found the metre fatally conducive to diffuseness and padding, and to lines like

> The shepherd swain of whom I mention made,[1]

and when he is successful does not echo Spenser at all, but produces an artless and candid music of his own:

> But who the melodies of morn can tell?
> The wild brook babbling down the mountain-side;
> The lowing herd; the sheepfold's simple bell;
> The pipe of early shepherd dim descried
> In the lone valley; echoing far and wide
> The clamorous horn along the cliffs above;
> The hollow murmur of the ocean-tide;
> The hum of bees, and linnet's lay of love,
> And the full choir that wakes the universal grove.[2]

Chatterton followed the Fletchers in elaborating the stanza to unwieldy proportions, and added a fourth rhyme sound, while not always keeping the Alexandrine close:

> Soone as the erlie maten bell was tolde,
> And sonne was come to byd us all good daie,
> Both armies on the feeld, both brave and bolde,
> Prepar'd for fyghte in champyon arraie.
> As when two bullies, destynde for Hocktide fyghte,
> Are yoked bie the necke within a sparre,
> Theie rend the erthe and travellyrs affryghte,
> Lackynge to gage the sportive bloudie warre;
> So lacked Harroldes menne to come to blowes
> The Normans lacked for to wielde their bowes[3]

The resemblance to the Spenserian is here almost lost, though the evolution is made plain in Chatterton's other poems.

To Burns the stanza carries with it no atmosphere of remoteness and romance, no temptation to artificial style or archaism. He uses it for a simple tale of familiar and humble life, told in dialect:

> With kindly welcome, Jenny brings him ben;
> A strappin' youth, he takes the mother's eye;

---

[1] *The Minstrel*, Bk. I, p. 7. [2] *The Minstrel*, Book I, p. 20.
[3] *The Battle of Hastings*, (1), *Rowley Poems*, p. 211.

Blythe Jenny sees the visit's no ill taen;
The father cracks of horses, pleughs, and kye.[1]

and for rather verbose, though artless moralising:

O happy love! where love like this is found:
O heart-felt raptures! bliss beyond compare!
I've pacèd much this weary, mortal round,
And sage experience bids me to declare:—
'If Heaven a draught of heavenly pleasure spare,
One cordial in this melancholy vale,
'Tis when a youthful, loving, modest pair,
In other's arms, breathe out the tender tale
Beneath the milk-white thorn that scents the ev'ning gale.[1]

In the Romantic Revival the Spenserian stanza came to the forefront of metrical art, and to that period belong the most beautiful and original handlings of the metre outside *The Faerie Queene*, though in Wordsworth's *The Female Vagrant* Romanticism is also responsible for the most atrocious Spenserians which have been preserved.

In Shelley's *Revolt of Islam* there is no suggestion of the Spenserian moonlight or dreamlight. The movement is fierce and fluent, with much overrunning:

Can man be free if woman be a slave?
Chain one who lives, and breathes this boundless air,
To the corruption of a closèd grave!
Can they whose mates are beasts, condemned to bear→
Scorn, || heavier far than toil or anguish, || dare→
To trample their oppressors? || in their home
Among their babes, || thou knowest a curse would wear→
The shape of woman— || hoary Crime would come→
Behind, || and Fraud rebuild religion's tottering dome.[2]

In *Adonais*, though the tone is quieter, there is a passionate and wistful ardour which, combined with overflow and double rhymes, distinguishes Shelley's handling from the traditional one:

And others came. . . . Desires and Adorations,
Wingèd Persuasions and veiled Destinies,
Splendours, || and Glooms, || and glimmering Incarnations→
Of hopes and fears, || and twilight Phantasies;

---

[1] *The Cottar's Saturday Night*, *Poetry*, Vol. I, p. 109.
[2] *The Revolt of Islam*, Canto II, *Poetical Works*, p. 63.

And Sorrow, with her family of Sighs,
And Pleasure, blind with tears, || led by the gleam→
Of her own dying smile instead of eyes,
Came in slow pomp;—the moving pomp might seem→
Like pageantry of mist on an autumnal stream.[1]

Much more of the sleepy music of Spenser finds its way into Keats's *Eve of Saint Agnes*, especially in the passages of rich description; at other times the verse is much lighter and brisker, with a dancing movement and much overrunning, but each stanza is caught back into dreamland by the spell of the Alexandrine:

She danc'd along with vague regardless eyes,
Anxious her lips, her breathing quick and short:
The hallow'd hour was near at hand: || she sighs→
Amid the timbrels, || and the throng'd resort→
Of whisperers in anger, or in sport;
Mid looks of love, defiance, hate, and scorn,
Hoodwink'd with faery fancy; all amort,
Save to St. Agnes and her lambs unshorn,
And all the bliss to be before to-morrow morn.[2]

Neither Keats nor Shelley had anything to fear from Byron as a fellow-practitioner of the Spenserian stanza. *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* begins, and intermittently continues, in the traditional style of spacious and leisurely narration, but without either finesse or simplicity. The verse is always vigorous, but the overrunning is not well managed, and the most common effect is hurried, hoarse, and declamatory:

Horribly beautiful! but on the verge,
From side to side, beneath the glittering morn,
An Iris sits, amidst the infernal surge,
Like Hope upon a death-bed, and, unworn→
Its steady dyes, while all around is torn→
By the distracted waters, bears serene→
Its brilliant hues with all their beams unshorn,
Resembling, 'mid the torture of the scene,
Love watching Madness with unalterable mien.[3]

In *The Lotos-Eaters* all Tennyson's sophisticated and conscious art is employed to bring out of the Spenserian

[1] *Adonais*, Stanza XIII, *Poetical Works*, p. 429.
[2] *The Eve of St. Agnes*, *Poems*, p. 182.
[3] *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto IV, *Works*, p. 229.

stanza the atmosphere of a remote and lovely, but evilly enchanted country, and with superb effect. The lethargy of effortless pleasure is wonderfully suggested in the slow movement and skilfully wrought sound-sequences of his verse :

> A land of streams ! some, like a downward smoke,
> Slow-dropping veils of thinnest lawn, did go ;
> And some thro' wavering lights and shadows broke,
> Rolling a slumbrous sheet of foam below.
> They saw the gleaming river seaward flow
> From the inner land : far off, three mountain-tops,
> Three silent pinnacles of aged snow,
> Stood sunset-flush'd : and, dew'd with showery drops,
> Up-clomb the shadowy pine above the woven copse.[1]

One of the most original of recent handlings of the Spenserian stanza is in a short poem by Alexander Smith, *Lady Barbara*. The poem may owe something to William Morris's treatment of the other great narrative stanza, but it has more crispness and activity :

> ' Strange constellations burned above my head,
> Strange birds around the vessel shrieked and flew,
> Strange shapes, like shadows, through the clear sea fled
> As our lone ship, wide-winged, came rippling through,
> Angering to foam the smooth and sleepy blue.'
> The lady sighed ' Far, far upon the sea,
> My own Sir Arthur, could I die with you !
> The wind blows shrill between my love and me '
> Fond heart ! the space between was but the apple-tree.[2]

Of the other narrative stanzas composed of five-foot lines, the most individual is *Ottava Rima*, an Italian stanza imported by the Elizabethans, at first in translation, and used by Fairfax for his famous version of Tasso's *Gerusalemme Liberata*. It is rhymed *abababcc* and is a brisk businesslike metre with a martial suggestion, but neither the grace of Rime Royal nor the subtlety of the Spenserian :

> The purple morning left her crimsen bed,
> And dond her robes of pure vermilion hew,
> Her amber locks she crown'd with roses red,
> In Edens flowrie gardens gathred new.

---

[1] *The Lotos-Eaters*, *Works*, p. 54.
[2] *Lady Barbara*, *Poems*, p. 152.

When through the campe a murmur shrill was spred,
Arme, arme, they cride; arme, arme, the trumpets blew,
Their merrie noise preuents the ioyfull blast,
So humme small bees, before their swarmes they cast.[1]

Drayton used this stanza for *The Barons' Wars* and *The Battle of Agincourt*, and shows that he felt its special suitability for military subjects by an interesting note in the introduction to *The Barons' Wars* telling how he changed the poem from 'the stanza of seaven lines' (Rime Royal), 'the often harmonie thereof softened the verse more than the maiesty of the subject would permit. . . . Therefore . . . I chose Ariosto's stanza, of all other the most complete and best proportioned.'[2] Diagrams are given, showing the rhyme schemes. Evidently he felt the Rime Royal to be too romantic for his purpose, and his rewriting of the poem does much credit to his sensitiveness as an artist:

The bloodie factions and rebellious pride
Of a strong nation, whose vnmanag'd might
Them from their naturall Soueraigne did diuide,
Their due subiection, and his lawfull right,
Whom their light error loosely doth misguide,
Vrg'd by lewd Minions tyrannous despight;
Me from soft layes, and tender loues doth bring,
Of dreadful sights, and horrid warres to sing.[3]

William Browne however found the metre suitable for much milder narrative in some of *Britannia's Pastorals*. The movement tends to be a little facile and trite, though the stanza has the merits which Drayton mentions of completeness and proportion:

The alters of the gods stood now forlorne;
Their mirrhe and frankincense was kept awaye,
And fairest Cytherea (that was borne
Out of the white froth of the working sea)
Wanted her votaryes; nay, some in scorne
Durste vaunte, while they the sacrifice delay,
This was a deity, indeed for whome→
The gods themselves might be a hecatombe.[4]

---

[1] *Godfrey of Bulloigne*, Bk. III, i. p. 39.
[2] *The Barrons Warres, To the Reader*, p. A 3 a.
[3] *The Barrons Warres, Poems*, 1605, p. B 1 a.
[4] *Britannia's Pastorals*, Book III, Song 2, p. 37.

Like the Spenserian, the Ottava Rima was revived by the three young Romantics. Keats turned it to the uses of romantic narrative in *Isabella*, where he emphasises the formal construction of the stanza by conventions and repetitions of phrasing, which make the general effect stiffer and less spontaneous than almost anything else which he wrote:

> And she forgot the stars, the moon, the sun,
> And she forgot the blue above the trees,
> And she forgot the dells where waters run,
> And she forgot the chilly autumn breeze;
> She had no knowledge when the day was done,
> And the new moon she saw not: but in peace
> Hung over her sweet Basil evermore,
> And moisten'd it with tears unto the core.[1]

In *The Witch of Atlas* it has Shelley's usual fluency and freedom, but little individual distinction:

> For she was beautiful—her beauty made→
> The bright world dim, and everything beside
> Seemed like the fleeting image of a shade:
> No thought of living spirit could abide,
> Which to her looks had ever been betrayed,
> Or any object in the world so wide,
> Or any hope within the circling skies,
> But on her form, and in her inmost eyes.[2]

But Ottava Rima found at last its absolute home in *Don Juan*, being capable, as Keats had shown, of sufficient sweetness and sentimentality for the more tender and idyllic passages, but being exactly the measure to embody the spirit of the witty and unimpassioned matter which forms the main part of the story, and that confident and peerless bravado which makes Byron's poem unique. Much of its character is given to it by the clever handling of far-fetched double and triple rhymes:

> In France, for instance, he would write a chanson;
> In England a six canto quarto tale;
> In Spain he'd make a ballad or romance on
> The last war—much the same in Portugal;

---

[1] *Isabella, Poems*, p. 177.
[2] *The Witch of Atlas, Poetical Works*, p. 369.

In Germany, the Pegasus he'd prance on
Would be old Goethe's—(see what says De Staël);
In Italy he'd ape the "Trecentisti":
In Greece, he'd sing some sort of hymn like this t'ye:[1]

The stanza of five-foot lines rhymed *ababcc*, though it looks like a shortened form of Ottava Rima, has a very different character and a much fuller though less important history. It is graver in movement, and, though not unpopular as a narrative measure, has never been the vehicle of any great or important narrative poem. Its success is greatest in poems of a reflective or elegiac cast, and its characteristic tone will be seen in the following three examples from different stages of its history:

The life is long, that lothsumly doth last:
The dolefull dayes draw slowly to their date:
The present panges, and painfull plages forepast
Yelde griefe aye grene to stablish this estate
So that I feele, in this great storme, and strife,
The death is swete that endeth such a life.[2]

From gloomy shadows of eternall night,
Shut vp in darkness where I long did dwell,
O heere beholde me miserable wight,
Lastly, inuokt my tragedie to tell;
Giue me then leaue my sorrowes to impart,
Somewhat to ease my poore afflicted hart.[3]

Not by the justice that my father spurn'd
Not for the thousands whom my father slew,
Altars unfed and temples overturn'd
Cold hearts and thankless tongues where thanks were due;
Fell this late voice from lips that cannot lie,
Stern sentence of the powers of Destiny[4]

With the last line an Alexandrine, however, it is a favourite stanza of Oscar Wilde, who uses it with very pleasant effect for lyrical narrative and description:

A moment more, the startled leaves had stirred,
Endymion would have passed across the mead→
/ \ × / ×
Moonstruck with love, | and this still Thames had heard→

[1] *Don Juan*, Canto III, *Works*, p. 683.
[2] *Songes and Sonettes*, p. N 3 b.
[3] Drayton, *The Legend of Pierce Gaveston, Poems*, 1605, p. Gg 8 a.
[4] Matthew Arnold, *Mycerinus, Poems*, p. 36.

Pan plash | and paddle groping for some reed
To lure from her blue cave that Naiad maid
Who for such piping listens half in joy and half afraid.[1]

A stanza of four-foot lines with the same rhyme scheme is a common and very satisfactory lyric metre; of somewhat sombre movement:

Synce loue will nedes, that I shall loue:
Of very force I must agree.
And since no chance may it remoue:
In wealth, and in aduersitie,
I shall alway my self apply
To serue, and suffer paciently.[2]

We cannot kindle when we will
The Fire which in the heart resides,
The Spirit bloweth and is still,
In mystery our soul abides:
But tasks in hours of insight will'd
Can be through hours of gloom fulfill'd [3]

A very similar effect, restrained and mournful, is obtained by Rossetti from the similar but rather more distinctive stanza, consisting of an enclosed, instead of a crossed, quatrain, followed by a couplet, which he uses for *Dante at Verona*:

Of Florence and of Beatrice
Servant and singer from of old,
O'er Dante's heart in youth had toll'd
The knell that gave his Lady peace;
And now in manhood flew the dart
Wherewith his City pierced his heart.[4]

The ancestors of most of the simple lyric and narrative stanzas are the long-lined couplets so popular during the sixteenth century for lyric and dramatic purposes. The Alexandrine couplet, long used as a narrative measure, though never by any writers with great poetic sense, resolves itself easily into a three-foot quatrain:

My youthfull yeres are past,
My ioyfull dayes are gone:
My life it may not last,
My graue and I am one.[5]

---

[1] *The Burden of Itys*, *Poems*, p. 94. [2] *Songes and Sonettes*, p. K 4 a.
[3] Matthew Arnold, *Morality*, *Poems*, p. 192.
[4] *Dante at Verona*, *Poetical Works*, p. 1.
[5] *Songes and Sonettes*, p. S 2 a.

This has never become one of the most popular of English stanzas, but its capabilities are well represented in Cowper's *The Loss of the Royal George*:[1]

His sword was in its sheath;
His fingers held the pen
When Kempenfelt went down
With twice four hundred men.

A still commoner metre among the Tudor poets is *Poulter's Measure*, a rhymed couplet of which the first line is an Alexandrine, the second a fourteener:

Layd in my quiet bed, in study as I were,
I saw within my troubled head, a heape of thoughtes appere.[2]

When the lines are broken by pause, and internal rhyme appears, as in the above example, we have, except for the convention of printing, the stanza 3343, which has a continuous though not very important history, mainly in the hymnbooks, and seems most fitted for devotional lyric:

My eyes for beauty pine,
My soul for Goddës grace:
No other care or hope is mine;
To heaven I turn my face.[3]

Its capabilities are perhaps best shewn in a single stanza of Tennyson's, from an irregular lyric in *Maud*:

/ × × / × ×
O that | 'twere pos|sible
/ × / / × /
After | long grief | and pain
To find the arms of my true love
/
Round | me once | again![4]

But with the long line further resolved, and the measure quickened to anapaestic, this gives us the famous limerick stanza.

The importance of both these couplets is insignificant compared with that of the fourteener, which is a mighty

[1] *The Loss of the Royal George*, *Poems*, p. 433.
[2] *Songes and Sonettes*, p. E 2 a.
[3] Bridges, *Shorter Poems*, Bk. IV, 9, *Poetical Works*, Vol. II, p. 134.
[4] *Maud*, Part II, IV, *Works*, p. 303.

striding measure in its unresolved form, where its culminating achievement is Chapman's translation of Homer:

> This sight outwrought discourse, cold Feare shooke Hector from his stand,
> No more stay now, all ports were left; he fled in feare the hand
> Of that Feare master, who hawk-like, ayres swiftest passenger,
> That holds a timorous Dove in chace, and with command doth beare
> His fierie onset: the Dove hasts, the Hawke comes whizzing on,
> This way, and that, he turnes and winds, and cuffes the Pigeon; [1]

and in its resolved form gives us the great metre of all work, the ballad stanza, 4343, rhymed sometimes *abab* and sometimes *abcb* without much difference of effect.

To illustrate the range of effect attainable in ballad stanza would be an undertaking far beyond the scope of this chapter. It seems the simplest and most natural of metrical forms for English to adopt, and the one chosen by instinctive poets: the minstrels chose it for narratives of fighting, of heroic and tragic love, for tunes blown upon the horns of Elfland, and for tales of mystery and terror: in it the first verse essays of children are generally couched. No metre is so common and so adaptable, and yet it is not without character. There is buoyancy and tune in it, a distillation of the pure essence of poetry which can uplift and bear along the stumbling crudities of primitive story;

> With that there came an arrowe keene
> Out of an English bow
> Which stroke Erle Douglas on the breast
> A deepe and deadlye blow.[2]

which can spiritualise the heavy solemnities of Wordsworth;

> A slumber did my spirit seal;
> I had no human fears:
> She seemed a thing that could not feel
> The touch of earthly years.[3]

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[1] *Iliad*, Booke XXII, pp. 301–2.
[2] *The Hunting of the Cheviot*, Version B, *English and Scottish Ballads*, Vol. 3, p. 312.
[3] 'A slumber did my spirit seal', *Poetical Works*, p. 187.

and can give to the butterfly lightness of Herrick, meaning and pathos:

Gather ye Rose-buds while ye may,
Old Time is still | a flying:
And this same flower that smiles to day
To morrow will | be dying.[1]

The most artistic variant of this stanza is that evolved by Keats for *La Belle Dame sans Merci*. Lengthening the second line by one foot and shortening the last, he changes the metre which can take the character of any subject into one which expressly embodies the mood of his ghostly legend, the mood of languid desolation and hopelessness, in a mortal half-restored from Fairyland:

O what can ail thee, Knight at arms,
Alone | and pale|ly loit|ering?
The sedge | has with|er'd from | the Lake,
And no | birds sing![2]

As the last line is so short, a single spondee gives it extraordinary heaviness, but in the above case the weight of consonants in 'and no' contributes to this effect.

A commoner variant simply extends the second line to four feet, leaving the last unchanged, an alteration which gives somewhat more of weight and solemnity to the stanza:

Some starlit garden gray with dew,
Some chamber flushed with wine and fire,
What matters where, so I and you
Are worthy our desire?[3]

A very common extension of ballad stanza is made by the addition of a third pair of lines, 434343. This is often

[1] *To the Virgins to make much of Time*, *Poetical Works*, p. 84.
[2] *La Belle Dame sans Merci* (first version), *Poems*, p. 244.
[3] Henley, *Rhymes and Rhythms*, XII, *Poems*, p. 134.

used as an occasional variant in the old ballads, and is very artistically used by Rossetti in *The Blessed Damozel*:

There will I ask of Christ the Lord
Thus much for him and me:—
Only to live as once on earth
With Love,—only to be,
As then awhile, for ever now
Together, I and he [1]

Ballad stanza extended by the doubling of its two long lines becomes *Rime Couée*, *aabaab* or *aabccb*, a metre popular in the early Romances, and later the vehicle of many great hymns, for which its characteristic effect, at once jubilant and stately, is very suitable. Its popularity as a Romance metre was parodied by Chaucer in *The Tale of Sir Thopas*, where we occasionally hear a note that looks forward to the greatest of all rime coué poems, Smart's *Song to David*:

The briddes singe, it is no nay,
The sparhauk and the papeiay
That Ioye it was to here,
The thrustelcok made eek his lay,
The wodedowve upon the spray
She sang full loude and cleere.[2]

This suggests the descriptive catalogues of Smart, to which the metre lends itself with great aptitude:

For ADORATION, beyond match,
The scholar bulfinch aims to catch
The soft flute's iv'ry touch;
And careless on the hazle spray,
The daring redbreast keeps at bay
The damsel's greedy clutch.[3]

But the greatest merit of the metre in Smart's usage is the double swell and fall of each stanza, with its suggestion of a rapt incantation:

Beauteous, yea beauteous more than these,
The shepherd king upon his knees,
For his momentous trust;
With wish of infinite conceit,
For man, beast, mute, the small and great,
And prostrate dust to dust [4]

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[1] *The Blessed Damozel*, *Poetical Works*, p. 236.
[2] *Sir Thopas*, *Works*, Vol. IV, p. 192.
[3] *Song to David*, Stanza LXV, p. 17.
[4] *Song to David*, Stanza LXXXI, p. 21.

Wordsworth used the measure in *Ruth*, in which the descriptive passages sometimes resemble Smart's, and with a touch of elegiac sadness in 'Three years she grew'. But more interesting are his variations of the form, in *The Green Linnet* and *To the Daisy*. The former has its four-foot lines in sets of three, and the shorter lines have double ending:

Beneath these fruit-tree boughs that shed
Their snow-white blossoms on my head,
With brightest sunshine round me spread
Of Spring's unclouded weather,
In this sequestered nook how sweet
To sit upon my orchard-seat!
And birds and flowers once more to greet,
My last year's friends together.[1]

This is the measure of Drayton's *Nymphidia*, where its effect of dainty briskness is more suitable than for Wordsworth's gentle musing:

Himselfe he on an Earewig set,
Yet scarce he on his back could get,
So oft and high he did coruet,
Ere he himselfe | could settle:
He made him turne, and stop, and bound,
To gallop, and to trot the Round,
He scarce could stand on any ground,
He was so full | of mettle.[2]

In *To a Daisy* the short lines are curtailed to two feet, but still have double rhyme:

If stately passions in me burn,
And one chance look to Thee should turn,
I drink out of an humbler urn→
A lowlier pleasure;
The homely sympathy that heeds
The common life our nature breeds;
A wisdom fitted to the needs→
Of hearts at leisure.[3]

Here we have an unescapable resemblance to that metre with a long history in Scots, known to us now as the Burns

[1] *The Green Linnet, Poetical Works*, p. 159.
[2] *Nimphidia, The Battaile of Agincourt etc.*, p. 130.
[3] *To a Daisy, Poetical Works*, p. 158.

stanza, and familiar to every schoolboy in *To a Mouse*, and Wordsworth's lines have the same tendency to enjambement, joining the short line to its predecessor, and to a sentimentally moralising tone:

> Still thou art blest, compared wi' me!
> The present only toucheth thee:
> But och! I backward cast my e'e→
> On prospects drear!
> An' forward, tho' I canna see,
> I guess an' fear![1]

By resolution into a six-lined stanza, as internal rhyming in the longer lines might suggest, the ballad metre becomes a dainty trivial measure for light amorous posies:

> My bon|ie Lasse | thine eie,|
> So slie,
> Hath made my sorrowe so:
> Thy Crim|sen cheekes | my deere,
> So cleare,
> Have so much wrought my woe.[2]

Herrick has several such resolutions:

> / ×
> *Julia*,| I bring
> To thee | this Ring.
> Made for | thy fing|er fit;
> To show | by this,
> That our | love is
> (Or sho'd | be) || like | to it.[3]

> Love, I | recant,
> And pard|on crave,
> × / ×
> That late|ly I | offended,
> But 'twas,
> Alas,
> To make | a brave.
> × / ×
> But no | disdaine | intended.[4]

The possibilities of such subdivision, down to single-foot lines, are of course open to all stanza-mongers.

[1] *To a Mouse, Poetry*, Vol. I, p. 117.
[2] *Phœnix Nest*, p. 60.
[3] *A Ring Presented to Julia, Hesperides, Poetical Works*, p. 63
[4] *His Recantation. Hesperides, Poetical Works*, p. 99.

A second important group of simple lyric stanzas consists of those built on the four-foot couplet. The simplest of all is the pair of such couplets, *aabb*. This has a remarkably naif and infantine character, and it is not by accident that it is the commonest metre in Stevenson's *Child's Garden of Verses*:

> Late lies the wintry sun a-bed,
> A frosty, fiery sleepy-head;
> Blinks but an hour or two; and then,
> A blood-red orange, sets again.[1]

It appears, however, often in love lyrics, especially among the Elizabethans, and like the continuous couplet, suffers the frequent encroachment of trochaics, as in Marlowe's *Passionate Shepherd to his Love*:

> Come liue | with mee, and be my love,
> And we | will all the pleasures proue,
>
> That Val|lies, groues, | hills | and fieldes,
> Woods, | or steepie mountaine yeeldes.[2]

In the occasional cross-rhyming common among continuous four-foot couplets we have another form of four-foot quatrain ready made:

> If right be rackt, and ouerronne:
> And power take part with open wrong:
> If fear my force do yelde to soone,
> The lack is like to last to long.[3]

The movement of this stanza is generally graver and more serious, though not necessarily more expressive of sadness than that of the ballad stanza, and it makes an excellent elegiac metre:

> Frail as thy love, the flowers were dead,
> Ere yet the evening sun was set:
> But years shall see the cypress spread,
> Immutable as my regret.[4]

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[1] *Winter-Time, Poems*, p. 28. [2] *England's Helicon*, p. Aa 1 b.
[3] *Songes and Sonettes*, p. N 3 a.
[4] T. L. Peacock, 'I dug beneath the Cypress shade', *Works*, Vol. III, p. 51.

The two rhyme schemes are combined in an eight-lined stanza of Wyatt's:

> All you that frendship do professe,
> And of a frende present the place:
> Geue eare to me that did possesse,
> As frendly frutes as ye imbrace
> And to declare the circumstance,
> There were them selues that did auaunce:
> To teache me truely how to take,
> A faithfull frende for vertues sake.[1]

The common extensions of the four-foot quatrain are made by the addition of a single line, which gives various effects according to its position in the rhyme scheme. The simplest addition, that of a third line on the *b*-rhyme at the end, is seen in Rossetti's *Rose Mary*, though this stanza takes its character rather from the frequency of anapaestic substitution:

> / / / × × /
> 'Pale | Rose Mar|y, what | shall be done
> × × /
> With a rose | that Mary weeps upon?'
> / × × /
> 'Mo|ther, let it fall | from the tree,
> × × /
> And never walk | where the strewn | leaves be
> × × /
> Till winds have passed | and the path | is free.'[2]

A similar addition to the cross-rhymed quatrain falls with the effect of an echo or afterthought, as in the beautiful sad cadence, not altogether in keeping with the sense, of Wotton's lines on Elizabeth of Bohemia:

> You meaner *Beauties* of the Night
> That poorly satisfie our Eies
> More by your number, then your *light*,
> You *Common people* of the *Skies*:
> What are you when the *Sun* shall rise?[3]

But various other rhyme schemes were explored from the early days of lyric:

> My lute awake performe the last
> Labour that thou and I shal wast:

[1] *Songes and Sonettes*, p. U 2 a.
[2] *Rose Mary*, *Poetical Works*, p. 114.
[3] *On his Mistris, the Queen of Bohemia*, *Reliquiae Wottonianae*, p. 518.

And end that I haue now begonne:
And when this song is song and past:
My lute be stil for I haue done.[1]

The form *abbab* has an unexpected and purposeful but rather sombre effect in Meredith's *Cassandra*, partly due to the use of the heptasyllabic line:

/ × ×
Capt|ive on | a foreign shore,
Far | from Ilion's hoary wave,
Ag|amemnon's bridal slave
Speaks | Futurity no more:
/ × ×
Death | is bus|y with | her grave.[2]

The simple alternative *ababa* is rare and not so artistic as the other forms. It does not give the impression of an organic whole; the last line sounds too much like an afterthought:

Long haue mine eies gaz'd with delight,
Conueying hopes vnto my soule;
In nothing happy, but in sight
Of her, that doth my sight controule;
But now mine eies must loose their light.[3]

The enclosed rhyme order *abba* is also found in the four-foot quatrain, though not commonly. Ben Jonson used it, and Rossetti and Tennyson rediscovered it independently about the same time, Rossetti for *My Sister's Sleep* and Tennyson for the great poem with which it is now indissolubly connected, and which seems to have determined its character for all time.

Ben Jonson wrote in this stanza a poem rather surprisingly entitled *An Elegie*, and also his beautiful little acrostic epitaph on Margaret Ratcliffe, but even at its most solemn the metre as he uses it has none of the slow sorrow-laden movement which Tennyson gave it:

Who as an off-spring at your shrine,
Have sung this Hymne, and here intreat
One sparke of your Diviner heat
To light upon a Love of mine.[4]

---

[1] *Songes and Sonettes*, p. I 1 b.
[2] *Cassandra*, *Poetical Works*, p. 159.
[3] Campion, *A Booke of Ayres*, X, *Works*, p. 25.
[4] *An Elegie*, *Underwoods*. *Works*, Vol. II, p. Cc 4 a.

It is used by Christopher Harvey, the imitator of George Herbert, who gives to it, like Tennyson, the tones of a hymn, but the pace is still light and free:

> Gold, frankincense, and myrrh, they give;
> And worshipping him plainly show,
> That unto him they all things owe,
> By whose free gift it is they live.[1]

Though Tennyson varies the character of the stanza with a skill which enables him to use it successfully for so long a poem, and merit as little as could possibly be imagined the accusation of monotony, there is always a slowness and dignity about it in *In Memoriam* which befits the elegiac purpose. This is sometimes achieved, in the more sorrowful passages by long vowel sounds and spondees, but often in the lighter parts by the emphasis of alliteration. It will be noticed how much slower are the alliterated lines in the following stanza than the others:

> Now dance the lights on lawn and lea,
> The flocks are whiter down the vale,
> And milkier every milky sail
> On winding stream or distant sea;[2]

The characteristic movement, of course, is much heavier:

> Old ward|er of | these bur|ied bones,
> And answering now my random stroke
> With fruitful cloud and living smoke,
> Dark yew, that grasp|est at | the stones[3]

From this potent rhythm later poets have found it impossible to escape in using the metre, and very little has been done in it since *In Memoriam*. It appears however in Oscar Wilde's *The Sphinx* cleverly disguised by being printed in two lines, and composed generally in a powerful

[1] *The Epiphany, The Synagogue*, p. 40.
[2] *In Memoriam*, CXV, *Works*, p. 280.
[3] *In Memoriam*, XXXIX, *Works*, p. 257.

march of rhythm with no pause at the end of the first line or at the half-lines where the internal rhymes come:

And let me touch those curving claws of yellow ivory and grasp
The tail that like a monstrous Asp coils round your heavy velvet paws![1]

This rhyme order, however, is fairly common with stanzas of mixed lines, two shorter being often enclosed between two longer:

Welcome Maids of Honour,
You do bring
In the Spring;
And wait upon her.[2]

Quite common and effective is 5225 with enclosed rhymes:

Shoote soft sweete Loue, for feare thou shoote amisse,
For feare too keen,
Thy arrowes beene:
And hit the hart, where my beloued is.[3]

Meredith has a graceful variant, with the last line lengthened to seven feet, and the shorter lines to three:

The daisy now is out upon the green;
And in the grassy lanes
The child of April rains,
The sweet fresh-hearted violet, is smelt and loved unseen.[4]

But the commoner and usually most successful stanzas have the last line shortened, as in this rather more complex one of Christina Rossetti's, 4232:

Love, to be love, must walk Thy way
And work Thy Will;
Or if Thou say 'Lie still',
Lie still and pray[5]

Stanzas composed of mixed or alternated five- and two-foot

[1] *The Sphinx, Poems*, p. 290.
[2] Herrick, *To Violets, Poetical Works*, p. 83.
[3] *England's Helicon*, p. Bb 4 a.
[4] *Song, Poetical Works*, p. 77. [5] *Poetical Works*, p. 274.

lines in couplet or crossed rhyme are not usually very attractive:

> O Faithlesse World, and thy more faithless Part,
> a womans heart!
> The true shop of variety, where sits
> nothing but fits [1]

Christina Rossetti, however, has a very successful 5552 in alternating rhyme:

> Tune me, O Lord, into one harmony
> With Thee, one full responsive vibrant chord;
> Unto thy praise, all love and melody,
> Tune me, O Lord.[2]

The alternately rhymed 4242 of Ebenezer Elliott's *Battle Song* has a stirring and martial briskness:

> Madmen! they trample into snakes
> The wormy clod!
> Like fire, beneath their feet awakes
> The sword of God! [3]

But the freakish 1414 of Herrick's *His Grange or Private Wealth* is only suitable for the affected artlessness of the poem for which he uses it:

> Though clock
> To tell how night draws hence, I've none,
> A cock
> I have to tell how day draws on.[4]

Short stanzas formed entirely of five-foot lines are not very common. The most famous is the five-foot quatrain, cross-rhymed, of Dryden's *Annus Mirabilis* and Gray's *Elegy*, a stately and leisurely metre. Dryden uses it with a rather sententious tone for general reflections, anticipating Gray:

> In fortune's Empire blindly thus we go,
> And wander after pathless destiny;
> Whose dark resorts since prudence cannot know,
> In vain it would provide for what shall be.[5]

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[1] *A Poem written by Sir Henry Wotton in his Youth. Reliquiae Wottonianae*, p. Y 6 b. [2] *Poetical Works*, p. 275.
[3] *Battle Song, Poetical Works*, Vol. I, p. 397.
[4] *Poems*, p. 246. [5] *Annus Mirabilis*, p. 51.

But he can also achieve a certain vigour of narrative:

> They charge, recharge, and all along the sea
> They drive, and squander the huge *Belgian* fleet.
> *Berkeley* alone, who nearest danger lay
> Did a like fate with lost | *Creus*|*a* meet.[1]

The elegiac note of Gray is anticipated in one of the many fine epitaphs on Sir Philip Sidney, which uses a similar quatrain, with enclosed rhyme, with very good effect:

> To praise thy life, or waile thy woorthie death,
> And want thy wit, thy wit high, pure, diuine,
> Is far beyond the powre of mortall line,
> Nor any one hath worth that draweth breath.[2]

The metre which seems consecrated to the solemn reflections of Gray, and to his regular monotonous end-stopped cadences of mourning,

> Full many a gem of purest ray serene,
> The dark unfathom'd caves of ocean bear:
> Full many a flower is born to blush unseen,
> And waste its sweetness on the desert air.[3]

was turned by William Morris to the purposes of tragic narrative:

> There lily-like she bow'd her head and slept,
> And I breathed low, and did not dare to move,
> But sat and quiver'd inwardly, thoughts crept,
> And frighten'd me with pulses of my Love.[4]

In Masefield's *The Wanderer* it is still wistful and melancholy, but without the epigrammatic tone of Gray, on account of abundant overflow:

> 'Perhaps tomorrow you will see her sail.
> She sails at sunrise:' But the morrow showed→
> No *Wanderer* setting forth for me to hail:
> Far down the stream men pointed where she rode,

---

[1] *Annus Mirabilis*, p. 18.
[2] *An Epitaph upon the right Honorable sir Philip Sidney Knight, Lord Gouerner of Flushing*, *Phœnix Nest*, p. 8.
[3] *Elegy written in a Country Churchyard*, *Poems*, p. 94.
[4] *King Arthur's Tomb*, *Defence of Guinevere*, p. 24.

Rode the great trackway to the sea, dim, dim,
Already gone before the stars were gone.
I saw her at the sea-line's smoky rim→
Grow swiftly vaguer as they towed her on.[1]

Another interesting five-foot quatrain, which is virtually the metre of a single poem, is that used by Fitzgerald in his translation of the *Rubáiyát* of Omar Khayyam. The rhyme-scheme, *aaba*, with its suggestion of finality and yet of incompleteness, suits well the sophisticated but somewhat wry-mouthed philosophy of the poem:

The Worldly Hope men set their Hearts upon
Turns Ashes—or it prospers; and anon,
Like Snow upon the Desert's dusty Face
Lighting a little Hour or two—is gone.[2]

Swinburne used the same metre for *Laus Veneris* and also for his *Memorial verses on the death of Théophile Gautier*, but with interlaced rhyme, one rhyme being carried from each stanza into the next:

Death, what hast thou to do with me? So saith
Love with eyes set against the face of Death;
What have I done, O thou strong Death, to thee,
That mine own lips should wither from thy breath?

Though thou be blind as fire or as the sea,
Why should thy waves and storms make war on me?
Is it for hate thou hast to find me fair
Or for desire to kiss, if that might be,
My very mouth of song, and kill me there?[3]

This interlacing habit of rhyme is the chief feature of the triplet metre called *terza rima* adopted by English poets from the Italian. The finest example of its use in English is in Shelley's *Ode to the West Wind*. Shelley divided his poem into sections, freely overrunning, of four stanzas, each concluded with a couplet which indicates a pause in the sense and music. The continuity of the rhymes and the frequent overflow of sentences from triplet to triplet intensify the impression of rapt and urgent ecstasy:

If I were a dead leaf thou mightest bear;
If I were a swift cloud to fly with thee;
A wave to pant beneath thy power, and share→

[1] *The Wanderer, Collected Poems*, p. 368. [2] *Rubáiyát*, p. 4.
[3] *Memorial Verses on the death of Théophile Gautier, Poems*, Vol III, p. 58.

The impulse of thy strength, only less free→
Than thou, O uncontrollable! || If even→
I were as in my boyhood, || and could be→

The comrade of thy wanderings over Heaven,
As then, when to outstrip thy skiey speed→
Scarce seemed a vision; || I would ne'er have striven

As thus with thee in prayer in my sore need.
Oh, lift me as a wave, a leaf, a cloud!
I fall upon the thorns of life! I bleed!

A heavy weight of hours has chained and bowed→
One too like thee: || tameless, and swift, and proud.[1]

The other classic example is Morris's *Defence of Guinevere*, where in the unresting and never completed continuity of the rhymes we feel the weary spirit of the queen, vainly and unwillingly taking up the burden of self-justification.

Triplets of various types form a fairly common variety of stanza. The simplest kind consists, of course, of three lines of the same length:

Madame, two Hearts we brake
And from them both did take
The best, one Heart to make.[2]

When as in silks my *Julia* goes,
Then, then (me thinks) how sweetly flowes
That liquefaction of her clothes.[3]

but a few famous poems have been written in triplets composed of lines of varying length, as for instance:

Who ere shee bee,
That not impossible shee
That shall command my heart and mee;[4]

Campion has a peculiar long-lined triplet of which the first two lines have six feet and a trochaic suggestion, and the third is five-foot iambic:

/ × / × / × / / / × / ×
Where are | all thy | beauties | now, all | hearts en|chayning?
Whither | are thy | flatt'rers | gone with | all their | fayning?
/ / × / ×
All fled; | and thou | alone | still here | remayning.[5]

[1] *Ode to the West Wind*, IV, *Poetical Works*, p. 574.
[2] Drayton, *The Heart*, *Poems* (1619), p. 288.
[3] Herrick, *Upon Julia's Clothes*, *Poetical Works*, p. 256.
[4] Crashaw, *To his (supposed) Mistress*, *Poems*, p. 195.
[5] *First Booke of Ayres*, III, *Works*, p. 118.

In stanzas formed of a triplet and an added line which is usually shorter we return to the common metre of the old carols. The fourth line is often a refrain, as in *Helen of Kirconnell* or Cowper's lines to Mrs. Unwin:

I wish my grave were growing green,
A winding-sheet drawn owre my een,
And I in Helen's arms | lying,
On fair Kirconnell Lea [1]

The twentieth year is well-nigh past
Since first our sky was overcast;
Ah, would that this might be the last.
My Mary! [2]

Morris revived the fashion for a Latin refrain:

My lady seems of ivory
Forehead, straight nose, and cheeks that be
Hollow'd a little mournfully.
Beata mea Domina! [3]

Sometimes the fourth lines all rhyme together, or rhyme in groups, as in Swinburne's *Inferiae*, which has six stanzas rhymed in two groups, and the rather unusual phenomenon of a fourth line equal in length to the lines of the triplet:

Spring, and the light and sound of things on earth
Requickening, all within our green seas' girth;
A time of passage or a time of birth
Fourscore years since as this year, first and last.

The sun is all about the world we see,
The breath and strength of very spring; and we
Live, long, and feed on our own hearts; but he
Whose heart fed mine has passed into the past.[4]

This example emphasises the special character of the form, the separateness of the added lines and the way in which they call to and answer each other throughout the poem.

[1] *Helen of Kirconnell, Oxford Book of Ballads*, p. 793.
[2] *To Mary, Poems*, p. 503.
[3] *Praise of My Lady, The Defence of Guenevere*, p. 241.
[4] *Inferiae, Poetical Works*, Vol. III, p. 75.

CHAPTER IX

THE SONNET

WHEN Sir Thomas Wyatt, travelling as a diplomatist in the service of Henry the Eighth, fell under the spell of Italian poetry, Petrarch had been dead for a century and a half, and Dante for more than two. But the lovers of Beatrice and of Laura were still the potent influences on all poetic lovers, and more especially Petrarch, who was less remote, both in time and in stature of soul, and who was felt to have brought to its highest perfection the form which Dante had practised in the *Vita Nuova*. Scores of his countrymen had lighted their candles at his lamp, and it was under his direct inspiration that Wyatt took up the task of introducing into England the cult of a courtly and refined love. In doing so, the English poet took over from the Italian not only sentiments and ideas and often the very idioms and images for their embodiment, but also the metrical form which Petrarch, following Dante, had made traditional for the celebration of ideal beauty and goodness. The rich and ardent sincerity of the best sonneteers was considerably diluted as it was handed down, both by the Italians themselves, and by Wyatt and his English followers, but the form lost little of its original purity.

The Italian sonnet, as Petrarch used it, consisted of fourteen hendecasyllabic lines, the first eight, called the octave, rhymed on two sounds always, and nearly always arranged in two enclosed quatrains, *abba abba*. In the remaining six lines, called the sestet, two or sometimes

three new rhymes were introduced, and were variously arranged, but most commonly so as to produce two symmetrical tercets, *ccd ccd*, or *cde cde*. By general consent, arrangements which closed the poem with a rhymed couplet were avoided by the best Italian writers. Double rhymes were the rule for the Italian line, which in English naturally became the five-foot iambic, with the double rhyme only occasional.

Wyatt hardly ever departs from the common practice of Petrarch in the rhyming of the octave, but shews a marked and interesting independence in his sestet schemes, for his favourite arrangement consists of a third enclosed quatrain, followed by a couplet, *cddc ee*. This he could not have found anywhere in Petrarch, for the rare sonnets of Petrarch which close with a couplet have their sestets rhymed *cdd dcc*, but he doubtless came across the order in the work of some less illustrious writer. The reason for Wyatt's choice was probably a very sound instinct for the genius of English poetry, and subsequent writers certainly supported him in his preference, clinging to the final couplet through many changing modes of sonnet structure, till a more pedantic and less poetic school reasserted the absolute authority of Petrarch. Wyatt's chief difficulty was to keep the metre of his lines steady, the common trouble of the poets of his day, and here the Italian, with its extra syllable and its double rhyme, seems to have been a hindrance rather than a help. Sometimes he carefully counts his ten syllables, but loses hold of the feet, makes the ninth syllable heavy and is satisfied with a double rhyme before its time:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 / 9 × 10
And there | him hideth and not ap|peareth.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 / 9 × 10
What may | I do: | when my | maistêr | feareth.[1]

In other cases he has made by ear a good extended line, with a light ending which demands double rhyme, and in writing the corresponding line he again has recourse to

[1] *Songes and Sonettes*, p. E 3 a.

counting, and although the metre is correct a strong syllable is made to rhyme with the weak extra syllable of the former line:

Ye that | in loue | finde luck | and swete | abundance, . . .
Let me| in bed | lye, dream|ing of | mischance.[1]

Occasionally, again, though both lines have the double ending, only their weak syllables rhyme:

Where he | abides | that mine | oft moistes | and wasteth:
The wer|ied mynde | streight from | the hart | departeth,[2]

And often when there is no question of double rhyme, the line wavers badly:

Which comfortes the minde, that erst for feare shooke[3]

which should perhaps be read

Which com|fortes the minde, | that erst | for fe|are shooke.

Hardly one of Wyatt's sonnets is free from one or other such blemish, though they became less frequent as he practised his instrument, and he learnt, before his early death, to use it with considerable melody and grace. The sonnet quoted below shows the slenderness of theme and the vibrant delicacy of emotion which became characteristic of the sonnet throughout the century:

My hart I gave thee, not to do it pain:
But, to preserve, lo it to thee was taken.
I served thee not that I should be forsaken:
But, that I should receiue reward again,
I was content thy seruant to remain:
And not to be repayed on this fashion.
Now, since in thee there is none other reason:
Displease thee not, if that I do refrain.
Unsaciat of my wo, and thy desire.
Assured by craft for to excuse thy fault.
But, sins it pleaseth thee to fain default:
Farewell, I say, departing from the fire.
For, he, that doth beleve bearing in hand:
Ploweth in the water: and soweth in the sand.[4]

[1] *Songes and Sonettes*, p. E 4 b.
[2] *Songes and Sonettes*, p. F 2 a.
[3] *Songes and Sonettes*, p. E 4 a.
[4] The louer forsaketh his unkinde loue, *Songes and Sonettes*, p. K 1 b.

The imperfection of the rhymes is typical, and so is the unvaried endstopping. It is noticeable too that, although Wyatt preserves the structural separation of octave and sestet, he seldom makes the distinct break in thought or emotional drift, which the Petrarcan structure is supposedly designed to enforce.

Some of the Earl of Surrey's sonnets and other songs were published, together with those of his friend Wyatt, in *Tottel's Miscellany*. Surrey had benefited by Wyatt's experience with the sonnet, and by his own concurrent practice of the five-foot line in blank verse, and his sonnets, which are fewer in number than Wyatt's, and not devoted wholly to the celebration of love, are much firmer in metre though Surrey is too ready to admit trochaic feet, and occasionally goes astray at the line ends in the manner of Wyatt. His great claim to honour is that he originated a much simpler rhyme-scheme of his own. The structural basis of the Italian form is kept, for the sonnet is still composed of an octave, separable into two quatrains, and a sestet; not only, however, did Surrey rhyme his lines alternately instead of in the enclosed order, a variation which was well known to the Italians, and is found even in the work of Dante and Petrarch, but he also introduced a new pair of rhymes in the second quatrain, and as the sestet invariably consists of a third alternately-rhymed quatrain and a couplet, the whole poem divides itself more naturally into three quatrains and a couplet than into octave and sestet. Surrey thus reduced the difficulties of composition, and discovered the native English sonnet form, which was found more suitable to a language less abundant in rhymes than the Italian, and became immediately popular. In honour of its greatest practitioner, it has become known as the Shakespearean form. A single sonnet of Surrey's,[1] which is perhaps his best, has the three quatrains with enclosed rhyme, *abba cddc effe gg*.

[1] Complaint that his ladie after she knew of his love kept her face alway hidden from him (I Neuer sawe my Ladye laye apart), *Songes and Sonettes*, p. B 2 a.

Of the sonnets by other hands in the *Miscellany* a few are very weak and faulty, or fantastic, in rhyme-scheme, but the majority are, metrically at least, quite sound, and testify to the speedy naturalisation of the sonnet in English soil. The form used, however, in those which have any pretensions to poetic merit, is always Surrey's. There is one exception, the anonymous *Praise of Petrarke and of Laura his ladie*, which is a perfect Petrarcan, and is worth quoting for its attempts, occasionally most excellent, at modulation of phrase length, in a time when most poets were content with endstopping:

> O Petrarke hed and prince of poets al,
> Whose liuely gift of flowing eloquence,→
> wel may we seke, || but finde not how or whence→
> So rare a gift with thee did rise and fal,
> Peace to thy bones, || and glory immortall→
> Be to thy name, || and to her excellence.→
> Whose beauty lighted in thy time and sence (:)
> So to be set forth as no other shall.
> Why hath not our pens rimes so parfit wrought
> Ne why our time forth bringeth beauty such
> To trye our wittes as golde is by the touche,
> If to the stile the matter aided ought.
> But ther was never Laure more then one,
> And her had Petrarke for his Paragone.[1]

The author of this, in choosing one of Petrarch's sestet rhyme schemes, *cddcee*, has taken one which satisfies his English preference for a couplet ending. He observes also, as Wyatt never does, the marked pause and turn of the idea after the octave, and the minor break after the first quatrain, compensating, however, for this greater formality of structure, by a much greater freedom of movement within the sections.

For a considerable time after the publication of the *Miscellany*, the work of Wyatt and Surrey seemed to bear no further fruit. The word *sonnet* retained its currency, but was applied to other kinds of lyrical composition than the Petrarcan quatorzain. It was not until the last decade of the century that there was a sudden and widespread

[1] *Songes and Sonettes*, p. T 2 b.

resumption of sonnet cultivation. The impetus at this time is thought to have come from France, where the sonnet had been assiduously practiced by the *Pléiade*. At all events sonneteering proved the most contagious of literary fashions, and the publication of a sequence, celebrating a real or imaginary lady, seems to have been almost a necessity for any gentleman who pretended to either academic or courtly distinction. Sir Sidney Lee's *Elizabethan Sonnets* contains no fewer than seventeen of these collections, dated between 1591 and 1598. The first fruits, in this case, were the finest.

Sir Philip Sidney's sonnets, most of which were contained in the hundred and eight of *Astrophel and Stella*, show many interesting varieties of rhyme scheme, and some advance in technique generally, but a much more notable advance in strength of feeling, and power of passionate and stirring poetry. The beauty and dignity of the sonnet form are fully realised when its restraining and shaping control is imposed on a sincere and lofty inspiration. By far the commonest form with Sidney is the Petrarcan octave, rhymed *abba abba*, followed by the English sestet, *cdcdee*, but a fair number have the octave alternately rhymed, and a few the unusual, but graceful and curious devices, *ababbaba*, which is found in Petrarch, or *abba baab*. Though Sidney's rhyme schemes mark the separation of octave and sestet, there is seldom any distinction between the content of the two parts, or any correspondence in the major rhythmic flow. The technique is generally that of the Shakespearean sonnet, constructed in three quatrains and a couplet, and in effective use of the couplet for a poignant and trenchant finality Sidney makes a great advance on the work of his predecessors:

> I now have learnd love right, and learnd even so,
> As they that beeing poysoned, poyson know.[1]

A sestet without the final couplet, rhymed in symmetrical tercets, *ccdeed*, is not uncommon, and the more subtle, less

[1] *Astrophel and Stella*, XVI, *Arcadia*, 1593, etc., p. 249.

emphatic, effect may be very apt to the expression of an involved idea:

> And therefore by her loves Authoritie;
> Wilde me these Tempests of vaine love to flee:
> And Anchor fast my selfe on vertues shore.
> Alas if this the onelie mettall be,
> Of love newe coyn'd to helpe my beggary:
> Deere, love me not, that you may love me more.[1]

With Sidney, there is seldom a break, even by a strong grammatical pause, between the octave and the sestet, though some of the most beautiful, 'With how sad steps o Moone' and 'Come Sleepe, o Sleepe', have the most important break in the sense there. The following is less famous, more typical in tone and movement, and as beautiful as any:

> Stella, since thou so right a Princesse art
> Of all the Powers which life bestowe on me,
> That ere by them ought undertaken be,
> They first resort unto that soveraigne part;
> Sweete for a time give respite to my heart,
> Which pants as though it stil should leape to thee:
> And on my thought give the Lievetenancie
> To this great cause, which needes both wit and Art,
> And as a Queene, who from her presence sends
> Whom shee emploies, dismisse from thee my wit,
> Still to have wrought that thy owne will attends,
> For servants shame of Maisters blame doth sit.
> O let not Fooles in me thy works approve,
> And scorning say, see what it is to love.[2]

Sidney admits occasional rime riche, and is not always careful to avoid assonances, and to vary the vowels of his rhymes. There is also a certain number of rather freakish exceptions in rhyme-schemes, sonnets where a single line falls out of the scheme altogether (though sometimes by an almost certain misprint), one sonnet rhymed throughout on the two words 'night' and 'day', and a few which are wholly or partly in Alexandrines.

Apart from *Astrophel and Stella* Sidney wrote a few sonnets in the pure Shakespearean form; most of these

[1] *Astrophel and Stella*, LXII, *Arcadia*, 1593, etc., p. 267.
[2] *Astrophel and Stella*, CVII, *Arcadia*, 1593, etc., p. 285.

are of weaker quality, but in one he rises, on an elegiac theme which was to be important in the future of the sonnet, to greater heights than in any of his love poems:

> Leave me ô Love, which reachest but to dust,
> And thou my mind aspire to higher things:
> Grow rich in that which never taketh rust:
> What ever fades, but fading pleasure brings.
> Draw in thy beames, and humble all thy might,
> To that sweet yoke, where lasting freedomes be:
> Which breakes the clowdes and opens forth the light.
> That doth both shine and give us sight to see
> O take fast hold, let that light be thy guide,
> In this small course which birth drawes out to death,
> × × /
> And thinke how e|vill becom|meth him to slide,
> Who seeketh heav'n, and comes of heav'nly breath.
> Then farewell world, thy uttermost I see.
> Eternall Love maintaine thy life in me.[1]

Spenser's *Amoretti* are eighty-nine in number, and of these only one is in the simple Shakespearean form. The rest are composed of three cunningly linked quatrains and a final couplet, *abab bcbc cdcd ee*. The form has obvious possibilities. It has the Petrarcan mingling of couplet and separated rhyme, and an added charm in the binding of quatrain to quatrain by the common rhyme, which should give continuity to the musical flow. But the form has never become popular. It is as exacting of ingenuity in rhyming as the Petrarcan form, without offering the peculiar Petrarcan balance and harmony, and to later sonnet-writers it was not recommended by any supremely great example. The Elizabethans preferred the simpler form, and for an after age Spenser could not compete as a model with Petrarch or Shakespeare. For Spenser's own sonnets, apart from their prosody, are not specially interesting. They have his unfailing music, his cunning vowel harmonies, and subtle alliterations; but the sonnet was not Spenser's metre. His magic is too diffused, too slumberous; the pregnancy and passion, the blend of intellectual and emotional ardour which the sonnet is peculiarly adapted to express, were not the qualities of his art. The absence

[1] *Sonnets, Arcadia,* 1593, etc., p. 322.

of definiteness and decision may be illustrated by one of the best:

> Men call you fayre, and you doe credit it,
> For that your selfe ye dayly such doe see:
> but the trew fayre, that is the gentle wit,
> and vertuous mind, is much more praysed of me.
> For all the rest, how euer fayre it be,
> shall turne to nought and loose that glorious hew:
> but onely that is permanent and free
> from frayle corruption, that doth flesh ensew.
> That is true beautie: that doth argue you
> to be diuine and borne of heauenly seed:
> deriu'd from that fayre Spirit, from whome al true
> and perfect beauty did at first proceed.
> He onely fayre, and what he fayre hath made,
> all other fayre lyke flowres vntymely fade.[1]

With most of the Elizabethans sonnet writing was distinctly a secondary or minor interest, resorted to in deference to fashion, but the fame of Michael Drayton rests at least as much on his sonnets as on his work in any other form. He practised the form extensively for many years, and successive additions to his collection, *Idea's Mirrour*, appeared at intervals from 1594 to 1619. In the earlier issues Drayton still uses occasionally the ill-sorted admixture of Alexandrines with the normal line, and allows very weak or 'rich' rhymes. Already his favourite form is the simple Shakespearean, but a variant almost as often used has the quatrains rhymed in the enclosed order. As the years advanced, Drayton came more and more to depend on the Shakespearean form, and attained in it to a perfection only less sustained than Shakespeare's own. To the latest edition belongs the incomparable 'Since there's no help', which, in spite of its Elizabethan form, has a distinct volte-face of mood at the beginning of the sestet. But another and less perfect sonnet will serve to show several technical points which resemble Shakespeare:

> Calling [to [2]] minde since first my loue begunne,
> Th'incertaine times oft varying in their course,
> How things still vnexpectedly haue runne,
> As please the fates, by their resistlesse force:

[1] *Amoretti*, Sonnet LXXIX, *Poetical Works*, p. 575.
[2] 'to' omitted 1605.

Lastly, mine eyes amazedly have seene,
Essex great fall, *Tyrone* his peace to gaine,
The quiet end of that long-liuing Queene,
This Kings faire entrance, and our peace with *Spaine*,
We and the Dutch at length our selues to seuer,
Thus the world doth, and euermore shall reele,
Yet to my goddesse am I constant euer;
How ere blind fortune turne her giddie wheele:
Though heuen & earth proue both to me vntrue,
Yet am I still inuiolate to you.[1]

Lines like three and fourteen, which contain one long word in the midst of monosyllables, the occasional double rhyme, and the grammatical form, in which one rather complex sentence, beginning with a subordinate clause, fills the whole sonnet, are characteristics of Shakespeare's usage.

The lesser Elizabethans nearly all chose the Shakespearean form, when they succeeded in achieving correct form at all, for much uncertainty seems still to have prevailed as to the true composition of a sonnet. Lodge's *Phillis*, for instance, has many so-called sonnets of twelve or fifteen lines, and various rhyme-schemes, and all the poems of Tofte's *Laura* are in a ten- or twelve-line stanza. Constable's *Diana*, however, shews many examples of Wyatt's favourite form, that which combines a Petrarcan octave with a sestet ending in a couplet, and this form is used by Daniel for the *Sonnets after Astrophel*. The pure Petrarcan appears in the unusually varied assortment of Barnabe Barnes's *Parthenophil and Parthenope*. But from Barnes we must quote, not a Petrarcan, but a Shakespearean sonnet, which, in spite of weak lines, and largely in virtue of a magnificent opening and close, strikes a note of sombre power unusual in the Elizabethan sonnet:

O Kingly ielousie which canst admitte
No thought of com-peers in thine high desier!
Loues bastard daughter for true-loue's vnfitte
Scaulding mens harts, with force of secret fier:
Thou poysoned cancour of much-bewteous loue,
Fostred of enuies pappes with wrathfull rage,
Thou which doest still thine owne distruction moue
With eagles eyes, which secret watch doth wage:

[1] *Idea*, Sonnet 51, *Poems*, 1605, p. Cc 5 b.

With Peacockes feete, to steale in vnawares:
With prognes winges to false suspect which flyes
Which vertues hold in durance rashly dares,
Prouoker, and maintayner of vaine lyes,
Who (with rich vertues, and faire loue possest)
/ × × / × / / / × /
Causeless hast all to thine harts hell adrest.[1]

Two licences common among the Elizabethans have their origin in continental practice. One is the writing of sonnets in Alexandrines, or with a mixture of Alexandrines, and even fourteeners, among the ordinary lines. The majority of French sonnets were written in Alexandrines, and the form was therefore not exclusively connected, for the cultured reader, with the five-foot line. The other licence, that of *rime riche*, was quite legitimate in French, and even found occasionally in Italian. The sonnet of Petrarch, ' Amor, che nel pensier mio vive, e regna ', which Wyatt translated as ' The longe love that in my thought I harber ' has

Ivi si loca, ed ivi pon sua insegna
Quella chamare, e sofferir nen segna.[2]

The form of Shakespeare's sonnets is invariable.[3] Being Shakespeare he dared to tempt monotony, and moreover used the simplest form of all. His is the longest of all the great sonnet-sequences, and the simplicity of his form is partly responsible for the subdued and controlled effect, the detachment with which tremendous passion is presented, as the unvarying repetition of one metrical unit contributes to the overwhelming cumulative power of the whole series.

The general impression of Shakespeare's sonnets is too well known to need illustration, and too rich to be fairly illustrated by a single quotation, but it may not be unprofitable to enumerate some of the more noticeable of his technical characteristics. He emphasises the simplicity of his technique by keeping the lines endstopped in a pro-

[1] Sonnet LXXXI, *Poems*, p. 53.
[2] *Sonetti e Trionphi*, Sonnet CIX, p. 69.
[3] Except for two, which are not sonnets at all, CXLV, which has the sonnet rhyme-scheme but four-foot lines, and CXXVI, which has twelve lines in couplets.

portion quite unknown in his blank verse. The greater number of the sonnets are endstopped in every line, and many more have no greater variation than a single phrase covering two lines:

> Fvll many a glorious morning have I seene
> Flatter the mountaine tops with soueraine eie.[1]

> But my fiue wits, nor my fiue sences can
> Diswade one foolish heart from serving thee.[2]

The utmost freedom which he allows himself is that of 'Let me not to the marriage of true mindes', which settles down to endstopping after the first three lines, or of 'Th' expence of Spirit in a waste of shame', which has all its lines endstopped, although much broken by pauses between the feet, and especially within the feet. The proportion of lines made up entirely, or all but entirely, of monosyllables is astonishing, especially in closing lines and couplets:

> All this the world well knowes yet none knowes well,
> To shun the heaven that leads men to this hell.[3]

A single disyllable in the closing couplet is quite the most usual phenomenon:

> In things right true my heart and eyes have erred
> And to this false plague are they now transferred.[4]

Such lines incline, as will be seen, to be very slow of movement, and weighted with spondees, or groups of consonants, or retarded with pauses:

> When yellow leaues, || or none, || or few || doe hange,[5]

and an impression of great solemnity and deliberation, or of spiritual oppression, thus obtained, is the characteristic mood of Shakespeare's sonnets.

But in the sonnet line, as in his blank verse, Shakespeare shows a marvellous skill with a device foreshadowed in

[1] Sonnet 33, p. C 3 b.
[2] Sonnet 141, p. I 2 a.
[3] Sonnet 129, p. H 3 b.
[4] Sonnet 137, p. I 1 b.
[5] Sonnet 73, p. E 4 a.

blank verse by Marlowe, and used in the sonnet by Drayton, the moulding of a line of monosyllables round one long sonorous and impressive word, generally, of course, a Latin derivative:

> With insufficiency my heart to sway[1]
> Who for thy selfe art so unprovident.[2]

The admission of such words brings in an almost inevitable pyrrhic, and lightens the line, or concentrates its weight on the stressed syllable of the long word. The same kind of concentration takes place where Shakespeare introduces one of his favourite compound adjectives:

> The sad account of fore-bemoned mone[3]
>
> And his loue-kindling fire did quickly steepe
> In a could vallie-fountaine of that ground.[4]

and it is by the varied position of such rhythmic 'crests' in the line that Shakespeare obtains the most subtle music and movement from the commonest of foot-modulations, pyrrhic, spondee, and initial trochee.

Many of the sonnets are composed of a single sentence whose divisions correspond with the quatrains and the couplet. The most marked pause is generally at the end of the third quatrain, and quite often the long sentence ends there, and the couplet contains a bitter summary or comment. In a few of the finest, 'When to the Sessions of sweet silent thought', and 'Not mine owne feares, nor the prophetick soule', there is a definite pause at the end of each quatrain, but there is hardly ever a more marked break after the second quatrain than at some other place, or any separation of ideas, or renewal of poetic force at the ninth line, which would suggest the division into octave and sestet.

William Drummond of Hawthornden is especially interesting as a sonneteer from the number and variety of

[1] Sonnet 150, p. I 4 a.
[2] Sonnet 10, p. B 3 a.
[3] Sonnet 30, p. C 3 a.
[4] Sonnet 153, p. I 4 b.

his poetic affinities, and from the evident interest which he himself took in the technique of his art. He studied and translated from the Italians, in some cases setting down an Italian sonnet, and translating it first into an English poem of identical or almost identical form, then into a quatorzain of rhyming couplets, and lastly into a sonnet which would be Shakespearean were not one or more of its quatrains in enclosed rhyme. This curiously mixed form is his favourite in his original sonnets and in his single translations from the Italian, and its unexpected changes of order are faintly irritating. Marino was Drummond's favourite Italian source, and from the founder of Italian Euphuism the Scotsman acquired his fondness for verbal paradox and juggling, seen at its height in a sonnet *Upon the Sepulchre of our Lord*, in which he imitates Sidney's ' night and day ' poem, rhyming throughout on the two words ' life ' and ' death ' :

> Life, to giue life depriued is of *Life*,
> And Death displai'd hath ensigne against *Death* ;

From Marino also he drew some of the religious mysticism which blossoms in the *Flowers of Sion*, and is a new inspiration for sonnet literature, heralding the magnificent work of Donne. The fairest of his flowers is a translation from Marino for which he borrowed one of Sidney's more complex forms, an octave rhyming *abba baab*, and a sestet *cdcdee*. The diction of this poem, however, with its lovely occasional polysyllables, its compounds, and the final couplet of slow monosyllables, takes us back at once to Shakespeare :

> Beneath a sable vaile, and Shadowes deepe,
> Of Vnaccessible and dimming light,
> In Silence ebane clouds more blacke than Night,
> The *Worlds great King* his secrets hidde doth keepe :
> Through those Thicke Mistes when any Mortall Wight
> Aspires, with halting pace, and Eyes that weepe,
> To pore, and in his Misteries to creepe,
> With Thunders hee and Lightnings blastes their Sight.

---

[1] *Vpon the Sepulcher of our Lord, Flowers of Sion*, XVI, *Poetical Works*, Vol. II, p. 17.

O Sunne invisible, || that dost abide→
Within thy bright abysmes, || most faire, || most darke.
Where with thy proper Rayes thou dost thee hide;
O euer-shining, never full seene marke,
To guide mee in Lifes Night, thy light mee show,
The more I search of thee, the lesse I know.[1]

The sonnet of pure religious fervour is seen at its height in the work of John Donne, who begins his *Divine Poems* with a group of sonnets. The first seven, entitled *The Corona*, constitute a rather remarkable feat. The last line of each forms the first line of the next, and the first line of all reappears, to complete the circle, as the last line of the seventh. Such linking makes almost excessive demands on fertility of rhyming, for the form used is the Petrarcan, as Wyatt used it, with its octave on two rhymes, the first of which must, in Donne's series, echo the rhyme of the preceding final couplet. The Marinist word-play, to which Drummond was addicted, sometimes affects Donne's style:

Whom thou conceiv'st, conceiv'd; yea thou art now
Thy Makers maker, and thy Father's mother;
Thou hast light in darke; and shutst in little roome,
Immensity cloysterd in thy deare wombe.[2]

Nothing in all sonnet literature approaches the blend, or swift alternations, of exquisite tenderness and amazing energy, reverent simplicity and subtle philosophy which characterise these poems of Donne's. The *Holy Sonnets*, some of which are in the Shakespearean form, with their breath-taking overtures, are, on the whole, more remarkable for energy than tenderness. The opening phrases generally march straight across the line limit:

Death be not prowd, though some have called thee→
Mighty and dreadfull, for, thou art not soe,[3]

Batter my heart, three person'd God; for, you→
As yet but knocke.[4]

---

[1] *Mans Knowledge, Ignorance in the Misteries of God, Flowers of Sion*, XVII, *Poetical Works*, Vol. II, p. 26.
[2] *Divine Poems, Annunciation. Poems*, Vol. I, p. 319.
[3] *Divine Poems, Holy Sonnets*, X. *Poems*, Vol. I, p. 326.
[4] *Divine Poems, Holy Sonnets*, XIV. *Poems*, Vol. I, p. 328.

Less clamorous but equally arresting is the opening:

> I am a little world made cunningly→
> Of Elements, || and an Angelike spright,[1]

The masterly freedom with which he uses overflow is the outstanding characteristic of Donne's technique. He often disregards the quatrain ends as places for pause, and even the final couplet is seldom separate, but continues a sentence begun in the last quatrain:

> Then turne
> O pensive soule, to God, for he knowes best
> Thy true griefe, for he put it in my breast.[2]

There is also a greater allowance of substitution, especially of spondees, which makes the sonnet in Donne's hands a less formal and a more impressive instrument:

> At the round earths imagin'd corners, || blow→
> Your trumpets, Angells, || and arise, arise→
> From death, || you numberlesse infinities→
> Of soules, || and to your scattred bodies goe,
> All whom the flood did and fire shall o'erthrow,
> All whom warre, dearth, age, agues, tyrannies,
> Despaire, law, chance, hath slaine, and you whose eyes,→
> Shall behold God, and never tast deaths woe.
> But let them sleepe, Lord, and mee mourne a space,
> For, if above all these, my sinnes abound,
> 'Tis late to aske abundance of thy grace,→
> When wee are there; || here on this lonely ground,→
> Teach mee how to repent; || for thats as good→
> As if thou'hadst seal'd my pardon, with thy blood.[3]

Milton's name is inscribed for ever among England's great sonnet-writers on the strength of a few very great poems. Though his originality, both in the matter of form and of themes, is not so great as is sometimes supposed, he handled the sonnet with the power of a master. His sonnets are not concerned with the subject of love, save for one on the dream of his dead wife, but his favourite theme, the celebration of a friendship, or praise of a national hero, had

[1] *Divine Poems, Holy Sonnets*, V. *Poems*, Vol. I, p. 324.
[2] *Divine Poems, Holy Sonnets*, VIII. *Poems*, Vol. I, p. 325.
[3] *Divine Poems, Holy Sonnets*, VII. *Poems*, Vol. I, p. 325. Another instance from Elizabethan printing where the stops do not correspond with the natural speech pauses.

been anticipated by the Italians, and by several of the Elizabethans, and his ardours and some of his technical habits by Donne. Milton went for instruction directly to the Italians, whose language and poetic laws he understood well enough to write himself several irreproachable Italian sonnets on the traditional theme. Even in these, however, he does not always preserve the separation into octave and sestet which was the habit of the greater Italian writers,[1] and in his English sonnets he almost always disregards the division, though he adheres strictly to the Petrarcan rhyme-scheme, only once closing, very effectively, with a couplet. His commonest sestet schemes are *cdcdcd*, and *cdecde*, but there are others less symmetrical. For most of Milton's finest sonnets, Wordsworth's 'soul-animating strains' is the apt description. They are processional. There is no wave-like advance and recession, the movement traditionally ascribed to the Petrarcan form, but a single uninterrupted progress, gathering volume to the last, or almost to the last, for even in the indignant 'Avenge O Lord thy slaughtered saints',[2] the furies are leashed, and the anger controlled to some measure of quietness at the close. In spite of their enormous vigour and force, Milton's sonnets seldom end abruptly, or with a shock, or even with the emphatic trenchant finality which the couplet gives to the Elizabethan forms. The most impressive of all the celebration sonnets, *On the Lord General Fairfax*, keeps the formal pauses of the Italian, and even the separation of the octave into two quatrains, but its sestet rhyme-scheme is an asymmetrical one, *cddcdc*.

Second only in magnificence to his trumpet blasts of exhortation and prophecy are the more contemplative sonnets on his blindness and on the dream of his wife, each with its very striking close, the first in a single separated

[1] It is suggested by J. C. Smart (*Sonnets of Milton*, Introduction, 30 ff.) that Milton's teacher, who was certainly not Petrarch, may have been Giovanni della Casa († 1556), who handled the sonnet form with much freedom, and had a habit of enjambement.

[2] *Miscellaneous Poems, Sonnets*, XIX. *Poetical Works*, p. 86.

line after many over-running ones, and the second in the slow, burdened, and often pausing line of monosyllables:

I wak'd, || she fled, || and day brought back my night.[1]

The most striking feature of Milton's sonnet technique, apart from his disregard of the Petrarcan divisions, is the rarity of endstopped lines. Except for the presence of rhyme, Milton constructs a sonnet as he does a blank-verse paragraph, a woven harmony of long and short phrases, crossing the line limit designedly, with a few intermediate or secondary pauses, with ample modulation, and the final resolution to the normal movement for the close. The sonnets addressed to friends, soldiers, and statesmen, begin nearly always with the name of the person addressed, 'Cromwell', 'Vane', 'Harry', which brings a pause almost at once. The major part of the sonnet is occupied with a descant of praise, and just before the end comes a short exhortation, or request, or invitation. Several of these are purely society verses, approaching in tone to the fanciful and frankly playful 'Captain or Colonel or Knight at Arms'. Milton must also have credit for the earliest, and one of the best, of humorous sonnets, *Tetrachordon*, with its good comic rhymes, and for another humorous though rather savage sally, *On the new forcers of Conscience*, for which he uses the form specially reserved in Italian for humorous or satirical subjects, the rather amorphous *Sonetto Caudato*, in which the sonnet itself is extended by the addition of a tail, consisting of a three-foot line, and a five-foot couplet, repeated as often as the poet likes.

In the general collapse of poetic intuition and high inspiration which followed the death of Milton and lasted well into the eighteenth century, the sonnet, though neglected, was not forgotten, but, like blank verse, was either given a brassy rhetorical efficiency or practised in misguided and feeble imitation of Milton. Nothing fairly worth recording was written in the sonnet until Words-

[1] *Miscellaneous Poems, Sonnets*, XIX. *Poetical Works*, p. 86.

worth found it. The spectacle of its degradation can, however, raise a smile in the work of that pathetic Milton-worshipper, William Mason, who surely deserves the throne of the Dunciad for writing a sonnet *To a Gravel-Walk*, which is quite worthy of its subject:

> Smooth, simple Path! whose undulating line,
> With sidelong tufts of flow'ry fragrance crown'd,
> 'Plain in its neatness',[1] spans my garden ground;[2]

The couplet formalism of phrase here invades the sonnet:

> Liberal though limited, || restrain'd though free,[3]

Mason imitated Milton in writing sonnets on his birthdays, and by way of compliment to his friends, but these differ from Milton's in being mainly about the writer, not the recipient, as well as in other respects. But Mason makes himself even more ridiculous when he bleats in imitation of Milton's sublime indignation:

> 'Prosaic Poetaster, cease to drain
> The filthy dregs of Epicurus' sty;
> They shall not mix with my nectareous strain!'[3]

The best work in this dull period was done by Thomas Russell, on whom the influence of the Italians and of Milton is palpable. In his finest sonnets, *To Valclusa*, 'On this lone Isle', and *To Boccaccio*, the definite separation of octave and sestet is observed, and Russell uses overflow with skill, and shews himself no mean master of the effects of the Italian sestet:

> Not for thy Gothic Trumpet's martial rage,
> Not for thy Latian Bays, || nor that 'twas thine→
> The Tuscan's rugged period to refine,
> Nor yet, Boccaccio, that thy faithful page→
> Reflects the genuine manners of thy Age,
> Nor that, enliven'd at thy sprightlier style,
> Pale Sorrow's Victims smooth the brow, and smile;
> For nought of worth like this, immortal Sage,

---

[1] Mason is able to lay the blame for this on Milton, who, in translating Horace, Ode V, Book I, has 'Plain in thy neatness'.
[2] *Sonnet XII, To a Gravel-Walk. Works*, Vol. I, p. 133.
[3] *Sonnet XIII, Occasioned by A Didactic Poem on the Progress of Civil Society, Works*, Vol. I, p. 134.

Haste I to twine this garland round thy tomb;
But that I oft have shared Nastagio's fears→
At his dread Vision, || oft have wept the doom→
Of fair Ghismonda, || sunk in early years,
I crown thee with this chaplet's simple bloom,
The Bard sublime of Terrour, and of Tears.[1]

Cowper characteristically tunes the Miltonic trumpet, on the rare occasions when he uses it, to the chanting of purely private and domestic affections, and his sonnet to Mrs. Unwin, 'Mary, I want a lyre with other strings', though valued more for tender sincerity than for artistic merit, is not without a certain musical delicacy and distinction. It is in the mixed form of Wyatt, a Petrarcan octave combined with a sestet *cdcdee*.

William Lisle Bowles would be forgotten were it not that his sonnets were so fervently admired by the early Romantics, and acclaimed by Coleridge as having awakened in himself the poetic spark. To the modern reader they seem merely inoffensive, mild descriptions of places, and pious or elegiac reflections on abstract subjects like hope. They are not pure in form. Bowles cannot achieve the Petrarcan octave, and though he prefers the enclosed order of rhyming he generally introduces at least one new rhyme, sometimes two, in the second quatrain. *On Revisiting Oxford* [2] has a couplet between the first and second of three enclosed quatrains, an unique and unpleasing experiment. Sometimes Bowles mixes his orders like Drummond, and at others extends the sonnet by the addition of a fourth quatrain. The sonnet dated November 1792, however, will shew that there is a tone of melody which may have passed from Bowles's poetry into that of the young Coleridge:

There is strange musick in the stirring wind,
When low'rs the autumnal eve, and all alone→
To the dark wood's cold covert thou art gone,
Whose ancient trees on the rough slope reclin'd

[1] *To Boccaccio, Sonnet VI. Sonnets and Miscellaneous Poems*, p. 6.
[2] *Sonnets and Other Poems, Sonnet XXVI*, p. 37.

> Rock, and at times scatter their tresses sear.
> If in such shades, beneath their murmuring,
> Thou late hast pass'd the happier hours of Spring,
> With sadness thou wilt mark the fading year;[1]

The sestet is much inferior, and the resemblance passes.

Coleridge wrote a number of sonnets, mostly during the early part of his career, and if Bowles was his inspiration, he soon outstripped his master and turned to nobler teachers. But perhaps his admiration for Bowles may be responsible for his remaining satisfied with impure forms like that of *To the River Otter*, rhymed *abba acdc dcdece*. The *Sonnets on Eminent Characters* are composed of three quatrains and a couplet, but nearly all in the mixed orders used by Drummond, and the last line is sometimes an Alexandrine. There is a good deal of over-running, and the language often echoes Milton:

> (Thy censer glowing with the hallowed flame)
> An hireless Priest before the insulted shrine,
> And at her altar pour the stream divine
> Of unmatched eloquence.[2]

But more often the voice is Coleridge's own, and in its power of striking out occasional splendid lines, as well as in the tone of those lines themselves, foreshadows Wordsworth:

> Thee stormy Pity and the cherish'd lure
> Of Pomp, and proud precipitance of soul
> Wildered with meteor fires. Ah Spirit pure!
> That error's mist had left thy purged eye,[3]

though Coleridge often commands a sweeter, lighter music than Wordsworth ever attained.

One feature of Wordsworth's practice which he could not have learnt from Coleridge is the Petrarcan form, which he took direct from Milton, and preserved faithfully, with few exceptions, through all his multitudinous dealings with the sonnet, though he allows himself occasional licence of rhyming the octave *abba acca*. No poet ever wrote so many sonnets as Wordsworth, and few great poets were

[1] *Sonnets and Other Poems, Sonnet XX*, p. 31.
[2] *To the Honourable Mr Erskine, Poetical Works*, p. 38.
[3] *Burke, Poetical Works*, p. 39.

so seldom visited by a genuine sonnet inspiration. The number of really great sonnets from his massive collections would form an even smaller group than Milton's. As he travelled anywhere, by night or by day, on foot or by coach, Wordsworth's mind seems to have been perpetually cogitating sonnets. Every object by the wayside, every group of wayfarers, every cottage, or ruin, or mansion, every fresh vista of landscape, was grist for his indefatigable mill. The habit may have been caught from Bowles, and is not a good one, for the simple description of a scene or incident is seldom fitly set forth as a sonnet. Yet the constant practice which it gave Wordsworth can hardly be thought wasted. The wilderness of the *Ecclesiastical Sonnets* blossoms in many a flower of phrase, and yields at last the perfect rose of the first *King's College Chapel*. And on the occasions when the genuine inspiration came, when the passing scene took on a sudden universal value and unfamiliar splendour, when some profound thought was passionately conceived, or some high ideal kindled a pure flame in the poet's mind, the metrical frame was ready and could be fitted to the theme without thought; the language flowed pure and effortless; the rhymes came unsought. Most of Wordsworth's best sonnets are inspired, like Milton's, by political and patriotic ardour, or by the idea of liberty. But his prosody is far more regular than Milton's, and the movement on the whole graver and less impetuous, more inclined to lingering spondees and the ionic a minore combination. Very often the first line is separated by a rather marked pause, and sets forth the subject and tone of the whole poem:

> Once did She hold the gorgeous East in fee;[1]
> Milton! thou shouldst be living at this hour:[2]
> Rapt above earth by power of one fair face,[3]

[1] *On the Extinction of the Venetian Republic. Poems dedicated to National Independence and Liberty*, VI. *Poetical Works*, p. 304.
[2] *London*, 1802. *Poems dedicated to National Independence and Liberty*, XIV. *Poetical Works*, p. 307.
[3] *At Florence. Memorials of a Tour in Italy*, XXI, *Poetical Works*, p. 365.

More often than Milton, Wordsworth makes a definite break after the eighth line, and devotes the sestet to a new aspect of his theme, as in ' It is a beauteous evening ' and ' The World is too much with us '.

Keats, the second great sonneteer among the Romantics, wrote with equal fertility in both the sonnet forms, though he seems to have found the demands of the Petrarcan too heavy. In an early sonnet, *To my Brothers*, he has the line :

> And while, for rhymes, I search around the poles,[1]

and in a later one he complains that

> by dull rhymes our English must be chain'd,
> And, like Andromeda, the Sonnet sweet
> Fetter'd, in spite of pained loveliness ;[2]

in a sonnet which is itself an experiment in greater freedom, rhymed *abca bdca bcde de*. There is ample evidence, indeed, in the sonnets themselves, that Keats often has to admit a weak line or phrase for the sake of rhyme :

> Or of the distance from home's pleasant lair :[3]

for instance, spoils the sonnet ' Keen fitful gusts ' by the use of the word *lair*, which is unfortunately rather a favourite with Keats.

> Till I heard Chapman speak out *loud and bold* :[4]

though not actually offensive, is definitely inferior to the rest of the magnificent sonnet in which it occurs. There is hardly a sonnet which has not some such blemish, and even when Keats abandoned the Petrarcan form altogether, there is often a rhyme-word which, if not actually inap-

[1] *To my Brothers*, *Poems*, p. 34.
[2] Sonnet XXVIII, *Poems*, p. 286.
[3] Sonnet IX, *Poems*, p. 35. The words ' pleasant lair ' also end a line in the sonnet ' To one who has been long in city pent. *Sonnet X*. *Poems*, p. 35.
[4] *On first looking into Chapman's Homer*, *Poems*, p. 36.

propriate, draws too much attention to itself, as, for example,

> the soft new fallen *mask*
> Of snow.[1]

Keats often disregards the structural divisions of both forms, and though he uses over-running rather sparingly, generally about twice in the fourteen lines, his rhythmic movements are sometimes free and unusual:

× × × / × / × × / \
There is | a bud|ding mor|row in | midnight[2]

Trisyllabic feet appear occasionally, and a final pyrrhic is characteristic. The following, though not usually cited as one of Keats's masterpieces, is typical in almost every respect, in the distribution of pauses, in the modulation, in the almost superhuman beauty, broken by a single jarring line, the sixth, where the lapse is, however, not due to the exigencies of rhyme:

> My spirit is too weak; mortality→
> Weighs heavily on me like unwilling sleep,
> And each imagined pinnacle and steep→
> Of godlike hardship tells me I must die
> Like a sick eagle looking at the sky.
> Yet 'tis a gentle luxury to weep,
> That I have not the cloudy winds to keep
> Fresh for the opening of the morning's eye.
> Such dim-conceived glories of the brain
> Bring round the heart an indescribable feud;
> So do these wonders a most dizzy pain,
> That mingles Grecian grandeur with the rude→
> Wasting of old Time—with a billowy main
> A sun, a shadow of a magnitude.[3]

Keats's language and music are his own, and betray little influence from his predecessors, but perhaps a faint echo of Shakespeare may be discerned in 'When I have fears that I may cease to be', with its archaic phraseology, its compounds, its skilful weaving of syllables, and its grammatical form, in which the quatrains consist of parallel

[1] *Written on a Blank Page in Shakespeare's Poems, Poems*, p. 288.
[2] *To Homer, Poems*, p. 281.
[3] *On seeing the Elgin Marbles for the first time, Poems*, p. 275.

subordinate clauses, and the whole is kept grammatically suspended till the last line.

It was George Darley, however, Keats's exact contemporary, who achieved an almost perfect echo of the tones of the lesser Elizabethans, even going so far as to indulge in an occasional admixture of Alexandrines or fourteeners in his pleasant sonnets, which have more music than matter:

> While the Moon decks herself in Neptune's glass,
> And ponders o'er her image in the sea,
> Her cloudy locks smoothing from off her face
> That she may all as bright as Beauty be;
> It is my wont to sit upon the shore
> And mark with what an even grace she glides
> Her two concurrent paths of azure o'er,
> One in the heavens, the other in the tides;
> Now with a transient veil her face she hides,
> And Ocean blackens with a human frown,
> Now her fine screen of vapour she divides,
> And looks with all her light of beauty down!
> Her splendid smile, wide-spreading o'er the main,
> Brightens the glass she gazes at again![1]

A few years after the death of Keats the sonnet which was described by Coleridge (to whom, however, it was dedicated) as the finest and most grandly conceived in our language was written by an Irishman, Joseph Blanco White, to whom English was a strange tongue, for he had been brought up, in Spain, as a Spaniard. But the poem needs no adventitious interest to recommend it. The brief measure becomes the magic casement opening on amazing vistas of poetic vision. The Petrarcan divisions are strictly kept, and there is a renewal of thought in the sestet, but the climax is reserved for the final couplet:

> Mysterious Night! when our first Parent knew
> Thee, from report divine, and heard thy name,
> Did he not tremble for this lovely Frame,
> This glorious canopy of Light and Blue?
> Yet 'neath a curtain of translucent dew,

[1] *Moon and Sea*, *Complete Poetical Works*, p. 470.

Bathed in the rays of the great setting Flame,
Hesperus with the Host of Heaven came,
And lo! Creation widened in Man's view.
Who could have thought such Darkness lay concealed→
Within thy beams, O Sun! or who could find,
Whilst fly, and leaf, and insect stood revealed,
That to such countless Orbs thou mad'st us blind!
Why do we then shun Death with anxious strife?
If Light can thus deceive, wherefore not Life?[1]

Neither Tennyson nor Browning has a place in the history of the sonnet, though Tennyson, in *The Bridesmaid*, made an innovation by introducing refrain. The sonnet is Petrarcan in form, and the fourth, eighth, and fourteenth lines are identical. His *Montenegro* echoes Milton's 'Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints', and his *Victor Hugo*, except for a cheap opening, is an excellent Petrarcan sonnet.

Tennyson's deficiency was balanced by the productiveness of his brother, Charles Tennyson Turner, who wrote many notable sonnets, of which the most original and delightful is *Letty's Globe*, which disarms, by its sweetness and delicacy, objections to the impurity of its form, (Elizabethan octave and Petrarcan sestet), and to the simplicity of its theme. And Browning's silence in the form is counterbalanced by his wife's eloquence.

Elizabeth Barrett had practised the sonnet often for occasional and devotional pieces before she used it for the traditional theme in *Sonnets from the Portuguese*. She uses the strict Petrarcan form, with sestets *cdcdcd* or *cdecde*. Only the first form occurs in her sonnet sequence, and though her rhyme-scheme is thus circumscribed and rigid, the rhymes themselves are occasionally faulty and unpleasant, though not nearly so often as in her long poems. Her prosody is characterised by a good deal of rather indefinite substitution, which causes the movement to waver uncertainly, and very little endstopping; often there is no strong pause from beginning to end, and there

[1] The Author's revised version, quoted in his Autobiography, *Life, etc.* Vol. III, p. 48.

is no attempt to separate octave and sestet. As in the Shakespearean form, the climax of Mrs. Browning's sonnets comes at the end, but is concentrated as a rule in a single line or half-line, which is often separated by a pause :

The silver answer rang,—'Not Death, but Love.' [1]

I shall but love thee better after death.[2]

and even when the culminating thought is expressed in two lines, it deepens in the last :

A place to stand and love in for a day,
With darkness and the death-hour rounding it.[3]

Mrs. Browning's most characteristic effect is the swift and unbroken crescendo of passion, whose swelling may be gradual and quiet, as in ' How do I love thee ', or excited as in ' My letters ', but which marches to an overwhelming climax.

The other great sonnet sequence of the century is D. G. Rossetti's *The House of Life*. Rossetti uses the Petrarcan form, with almost invariable separation into octave and sestet, and with various sestet rhyme schemes—but generally with those which avoid a final couplet. His peculiarities are mainly linguistic, and are such as to produce a rich and heavy effect. Much use is made of verbal echoes and assonance.

Fire within fire, desire in deity.[4]

plays throughout on two vowel sounds. In the following the burdened and muffled effect is wrought partly in the same way, but also partly by spondees and anapaests in modulation :

One flame-|winged brought | a white|-winged harp|-player
Even where | my lad|y and I | lay all | alone ; [5]

[1] *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, I, *Poetical Works*, p. 312.
[2] *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, XLIII, *Poetical Works*, p. 321.
[3] *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, XXII, *Poetical Works*, p. 316.
[4] *House of Life*, VI, *Poetical Works*, p. 179.
[5] *House of Life*, IX, *Poetical Works*, p. 181.

The first line rhymes with others ending in ' clear ', ' here ', and ' dear ', and illustrates the weak devices with which Rossetti fulfils the strict requirements of the Petrarcan scheme. His rhymes are often actually faulty, like ' grove-thereof ', in the same sonnet, or a weak syllable is made to rhyme with a strong one :

> Work, contest, fame, all life's confederate pleas,—
> What while Love breathed in sighs and silences.[1]

Shakespeare's compounds and long Latin words are multiplied to satiety by Rossetti—and often unduly emphasised by alliteration and other devices :

> Along his love-sown harvest-field of sleep.[2]
>
> O Lord of all compassionate control.[3]
>
> Clung the soul-wrung implacable close kiss.[4]
>
> Sleepless with cold commemorative eyes.[5]

A line of polysyllables is characteristic of him :

> Like multiform circumfluence manifold.[6]
>
> Their silent penetrative loveliness.[7]
>
> As instantaneous penetrating sense [8]

His best sonnets are not, however, to be found in *The House of Life*, but among those on Pictures and on the English Poets, which are less overladen with verbiage and more lucid and restrained.

Christina Rossetti's few memorable sonnets are very different from her brother's, being characterised by intensity rather than exuberance, and expressed with perfect restraint and quietness. She too uses the Petrarcan form, but without concessions or weakness in rhyming. One of the

[1] *House of Life*, XIII, *Poetical Works*, p. 183.
[2] *House of Life*, VII, *Poetical Works*, p. 180.
[3] *House of Life*, X, *Poetical Works*, p. 181.
[4] *House of Life*, L, *Poetical Works*, p. 201.
[5] *House of Life*, XCVII, *Poetical Works*, p. 225.
[6] *House of Life*, XLI, *Poetical Works*, p. 197.
[7] *House of Life*, XX, *Poetical Works*, p. 186.
[8] *House of Life*, V, *Poetical Works*, p. 179.

characteristics of her sonnets is that very often a kind of frame-work or outline is imposed by the repetition of a significant word or phrase, as the word 'remember' in the sonnet, 'Remember me when I am gone away', and a fondness for repetition and paraphrase gives a very marked slowness and solemnity to her work; the thoughts are deeply carved:

> O Earth, lie heavily upon her eyes:
> Seal her sweet eyes weary of watching, Earth:
> Lie close around her;[1]

The following sonnet owes its effectiveness to the repetition and amplification with increasing energy of the contrast expressed in the first two lines, till the evil aspect is wrought up to the masterly horror of the climax:

> By day she woos me, soft, exceeding fair;
> × / / ×
> But all | night as | the moon so changeth she;
> Loathsome and foul with hideous leprosy,
> And subtle serpents gliding in her hair.
> By day she woos me to the outer air,
> Ripe fruits, sweet flowers, and full satiety:
> But thro' the night a beast she grins at me,
> A very monster void of love and prayer.
> By day she stands a lie: by night she stands
> In all the naked horror of the truth,
> With pushing horns and clawed and clutching hands.
> Is this a friend indeed, that I should sell
> My soul to her, give her my life and youth,
> Till my feet, cloven too, take hold on hell?[2]

Absolutely different is the technique of Swinburne. His sonnets, like all his writing, consist of torrents of hurrying images, and are more broken and disturbed and eddying in movement than those of almost any other writer. There are many fine things in the *Sonnets on English Dramatic Poets*, but that on *John Webster* is perhaps the one in which Swinburne's impetuous, almost explosive, style finds the most fitting object:

> Thunder: || the flesh quails, || and the soul bows down.

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[1] *Rest*, *Poetical Works*, p. 293.
[2] *The World*, *Poetical Works*, p. 182.

Night : || east, || west, || south, || and northward, || very night.
Star upon struggling star strives into sight,
Star after shuddering star the deep storms drown.
The very throne of night, her very crown,
A man lays hand on, and usurps her right.
Song from the highest of heaven's imperious height→
Shoots, || as a fire to smite some towering town.
Rage, anguish, harrowing fear, heart-crazing crime,
Make monstrous all the murderous face of Time
Shown in the spheral orbit of a glass→
Revolving. || Earth cries out from all her graves.
Frail, on frail rafts, across wide-wallowing waves,
Shapes here and there of child and mother pass.[1]

Meredith's *Modern Love* has often been referred to as a sonnet sequence, and may be more fittingly considered here than in any other place. Actually, however, the divisions of this poem contain sixteen lines each, arranged in four enclosed quatrains, so that, though the first eight lines of a section often sound like the beginning of a sonnet, the repetition of the same rhythmic form in the last eight lines gives quite a different effect. The closing-in of the rhythmic range in the sestet of a sonnet reflects the rounding and completion of the thought, as the poet conducts it to an impressive conclusion. But Meredith's metre, though it lends itself to the same kind of intellectual and even aphoristic interpretation and generalisation of emotion as the sonnet, has less finality and more suggestion of continuity. Thus it falls in with the plan of the poem, which has a more connected story and developement of mood than any of our sonnet sequences. The range of feeling and tone is also much wider than in the sonnet sequences, and the expression which varies correspondingly between comedy and philosophy, cynicism and tragic pity, is too many-faceted for adequate illustration. The following section, however, will show the effect of the metre and also a characteristic fluctuation, which just fails of true harmony, between the gnomic and figurative idiom and passionate rhythm of the Elizabethan sonnets and the

[1] *Sonnets on English Dramatic Poets*, VII, *John Webster*, *Poems*, Vol. V, p. 303.

colder language and movement of modern psychological prose :

> How many a thing which we cast to the ground,
> When others pick it up becomes a gem !
> We grasp at all the wealth it is to them ;
> And by reflected light its worth is found.
> Yet for us still 'tis nothing ! and that zeal—
> Of false appreciation quickly fades.
> This truth is little known to human shades,
> How rare from their own instinct 'tis to feel !
> They waste the soul with spurious desire,
> That is not the ripe flame upon the bough.
> We two have taken up a lifeless vow
> To rob a living passion : dust for fire !
> Madam is grave, and eyes the clock that tells
> Approaching midnight. We have struck despair
> Into two hearts. O, look we like a pair
> That for fresh nuptials joyfully yield all else ? [1]

Meredith's poetic gifts were in many ways suited to the sonnet form, for his inspirations were never trivial or merely emotional, and when his imagination seized and kindled an idea the sonnet could give it a rhythmic dignity and harmony which his intellectual writings often lacked. The finest of his sonnets is undoubtedly *Lucifer in Starlight*. But except on the rarest occasions Meredith was not a great metrist, and even in this poem the abrupt and baulked endstopping of every line in the second quatrain, each of which gives the impression of being too short for its idea, weakens an effect of great magnificence :

> On a starred night Prince Lucifer uprose.
> Tired of his dark dominion swung the fiend—
> Above the rolling ball in cloud part screened,—
> Where sinners hugged their spectre of repose.
> Poor prey to his hot fit of pride were those.
> And now upon his western wing he leaned,
> Now his huge bulk o'er Afric's sands careened,
> Now the black planet shadowed Arctic snows,
> Soaring through wider zones that pricked his scars
> With memory of the old revolt from Awe,
> He reached a middle height, and at the stars,
> Which are the brain of heaven, he looked, and sank.
> Around their ancient track marched, rank on rank
> The army of unalterable law.[2]

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[1] *Modern Love*, XLI, *Poetical Works*, p. 151.
[2] *Lucifer in Starlight*, *Poetical Works*, pp. 181–2.

Among the many excellent sonnets which the later years have produced those of Robert Bridges would hardly deserve special mention were it not that he composed a sonnet sequence, *The Growth of Love*, whereas the best work of others, like Arnold's *Shakespeare* and Mrs. Meynell's *Renouncement*, has been in the form of single achievements. But though full of pure and delicate workmanship, and blending a markedly Elizabethan style with the subtleties of the Petrarcan form, *The Growth of Love* affords no examples of outstanding power or originality.

The palm for sonnet-writing in this century has been unanimously awarded to Rupert Brooke, whose two fine war poems will not need or suffer repetition here. Before the war, however, Brooke was an accomplished sonneteer on the traditional theme, with a distinctly individual manner, a more vivid restless fluency, and more overrunning than are usual in the sonnet. But even he returns to the time-honoured technique of the monosyllabic line for an impressive ending:

> Love is a breach in the walls, a broken gate,
> Where that comes in that shall not go again;
> Love sells the proud heart's citadel to Fate.
> They have known shame, who love unloved. Even then
> When two mouths, thirsty each for each, find slaking,
> And agony's forgot, and hushed the crying→
> Of credulous hearts, in heaven— || such are but taking→
> Their own poor dreams within their arms, || and lying→
> Each in his lonely night, || each with a ghost.
> Some share that night. But they know, love grows colder,
> Grows false and dull, that was sweet lies at most.
> Astonishment is no more in hand or shoulder,
> But darkens, and dies out from kiss to kiss.
> All this is love; || and all love is but this.[1]

[1] *Love, Collected Poems*, p. 36.

CHAPTER X

THE ENGLISH ODE

THE term " ode " has been loosely used in English, especially by poets themselves, sometimes as synonymous with ' song ' or ' lyric ', but it has gradually come to be applied especially to a lyrical address or meditation on a solemn or joyful occasion, often with a ceremonial character, and demanding a metrical form of greater elaboration and complexity than the more spontaneous lyric. As such the word may be used to cover certain types of composition allied in purpose and distinguishable in one of several ways from the stanza forms which we have already considered.

The most elaborate type of English ode is the true Pindaric, which aims at an exact reproduction of the major construction, though not of the actual metre, of the " epinikean " odes of Pindar. Pindar's odes were based on a unit composed of three metrical sections, called strophe, antistrophe, and epode, and corresponding to the movements of the dance to which an ode was originally chanted. The strophe and antistrophe exactly corresponded in metre, though they were often composed of lines which differed considerably individually in length and structure ; the epode was of a different and often simpler character. When an ode consisted of more than one such triad each pair of strophe and antistrophe might be different in metre from the others, but the epodes all corresponded with each other. In English practice the habit arose of making all the strophes and antistrophes of a

poem alike, and the epode usually a longer section of shorter lines.

The first ode of this kind was Ben Jonson's *To the immortall memorie and friendship of that noble paire, Sir Lucius Cary and Sir H. Morison.* One strophe which has become famous apart from its context may be quoted to show how timidly Jonson moves in the matter of construction. He rhymes in couplets, and each pair of rhyming lines is of the same length :

4A It is not growing like a tree
4A In bulke, doth make man better bee :
5B Or standing long an Oake, three hundred yeare,
5B To fall a logge, at last, dry, bold, and seare :
3C A Lillie of a Day
3C Is fairer farre, in May,
4D Although it fall, and die that night ;
4D It was the Plant, and flowre of light.
5E In small proportions, we just beauties see :
5E And in short measures, life may perfect bee.[1]

In the epode, though there is a little cross- and enclosed rhyming, the rhyming lines all correspond in length, except in one case :

5A For, what is life, if measur'd by the space
2B Not by the act ?
5A Or masked man, if valu'd by his face,
2B Above his fact ?
3C Here's one out-liv'd his Peeres,
3C And told forth fourescore yeares ;
5D Hee vexed time, and busied the whole state :
3E Troubled both foes, and friends ;
3E But ever to no ends
4D What did this Stirrer, but die late ?
5F How wel at twentie had he falne, or stood !
5F For three of his foure-score, he did no good.[2]

He also initiated the English practice of having all the strophes of an ode alike.

Jonson had no follower till Congreve wrote his Pindaric ode to Queen Anne, an 'attempt towards restoring the

[1] *To the . . . memorie . . . of Sir Lucius Cary and Sir H. Morison, Works,* Vol. II, p. 233.
[2] *To the . . . memorie . . . of Sir Lucius Cary and Sir H. Morison, Works,* Vol. II, p. 232.

Regularity of the Ancient Lyrick Poetry' to which is prefixed a long and learned discourse on the nature of such compositions. Congreve followed Jonson and fixed the common practice, in making his epode a longer section than the strophe and antistrophe, and formed of shorter lines, but he is more enterprising than Jonson in giving variety to the structure of both, and breaking the coincidence of line-length and rhyme:

Strophe.

5A Daughter of Memory, Immortal Muse,
5A *Calliope*; what Poet wilt thou chuse
3B Of ANNA'S Name to Sing?
4C To whom wilt thou thy Fire impart,
4C Thy Lyre, thy Voice, and tuneful Art;
5B Whom raise Sublime on thy Aetherial Wing,
6B And Consecrate with Dews of thy *Castalian* Spring?...

Epode.

4A High in the Starry Orb is hung,
4B And next *Alcides* Guard an Arm,
4A That Harp to which thy *Orpheus* Sung,
4B Who Woods, and Rocks, and Winds cou'd Charm,
5C That Harp which on *Cyllene's* shady Hill,
4D When first the Vocal Shell was found,
3C With more than Mortal Skill
4D Inventer *Hermes* taught to sound.
4E *Hermes* on bright *Latona's* son,
3E By Sweet Persuasion won,
3F The wond'rous Work bestow'd;
3G *Latona's* Son, to thine
4G Indulgent, gave the Gift Divine:
5F A God the Gift, a God th' Invention Show'd.[1]

The true Pindaric ode again enjoyed a brief vogue during the eighteenth century. The outstanding examples of formal perfection are Gray's two exercises in the metre, *The Progress of Poesy* and *The Bard*. Gray follows Congreve and Jonson in having all his strophes alike, and seems to feel with them that the limits of complexity in the rhyming and arrangement of lines are rather narrow ones. He rhymes mostly in couplets, but gives freshness by such unusual though simple devices as the quatrain 4545 at the opening of the strophe, instead of the more hackneyed

[1] *A Pindarique Ode: humbly offer'd to the Queen*, pp. 1–3.

form in which the odd lines are the longer ones, and his instinct for harmony and balance on a large scale is unerring :

4A Nor second He, that rode sublime
5B Upon the seraph-wings of Extasy
4A The secrets of th' Abyss to spy.
5B He pass'd the flaming bounds of Place and Time:
4C The living Throne, The saphire-blaze,
4C Where Angels tremble, while they gaze,
5D He saw; but blasted with excess of light,
4D Closed his eyes in endless night.
5E Behold, where Dryden's less presumptuous car,
4E Wide o'er the fields of Glory bear
4F Two Coursers of ethereal race,
6F With necks in thunder cloath'd, and long-resounding pace.[1]

Beattie in his odes *To Hope* and *To Fear* follows Gray in using the strict Pindaric form. But Collins takes considerable liberties with it, his ode *To Fear* consisting of a strophe and antistrophe with epode between them, that *To Mercy* of strophe and antistrophe only, and that *To Liberty* having two epodes.

The Pindaric ode was naturally not popular with the poets of the Romantic Revival, and the appearance of the strophic form in the nineteenth century is confined to the translations and imitations of Greek Drama. For the Greek dramatic choruses the ode form was often used, with some liberties as to the distribution of the epodes, and sometimes with interruption by dialogue passages. This was imitated by translators such as Gilbert Murray and A. S. Way, and by Swinburne in his imitations of Classical Drama. Many of Swinburne's and Gilbert Murray's choruses show far more daring and variety in the mingling of metres within the strophes and in the extension of the ordinary conventions of English prosody to make some approach towards the flexibility of the Greek.

The complex harmonies of Pindar were until the nineteenth century discernible only to a scholarly poet here and there, and his strict though ample structure is not often welcome to the English muse. Most English poets, there-

[1] *The Progress of Poesy*, III, 2, *Poems*, p. 51.

fore, striving for a similar effect, have resorted to other and less exacting means. The commonest method among the seventeenth century poets was the evolution of a fairly elaborate stanza, distinguished by its greater amplitude and complexity from the lyric metres, and from the narrative stanzas by being composed of lines of varying length closing often with an Alexandrine, and in the best examples far superior in coherence and proportion to the Middle English lyric forms, and their prolix descendants in the song books. Examples of odes or serious major lyrics in this form are fairly common in the seventeenth century, and are to be found among the works of Drayton ; a typical example is the stanza of Milton's *Hymn on the Morning of Christ's Nativity* :

3A Only with speeches fair
3A She woo's the gentle Air
5B To hide her guilty front with in|nocent Snow,
3C And on her naked shame,
3C Pollute with sinfull blame,
5B The Saintly Vail of Maiden white to throw,
4D Confounded, that her Makers eyes
6D Should look so neer upon her foul deformities.[1]

Daintier forms for lighter effects were used by Herrick, whose *Ode on the Death of Endimion Porter's brother* has an airiness more characteristic of the poet than suitable to the subject. Outstanding among compositions of this type in the eighteenth century is Gray's *Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College*, which is written in a stanza of unusual length and variety, and of considerable grace. But the stanzaic ode culminates in the work of Keats, who in four of his six great odes uses a stanza of five-foot lines, ten lines to a stanza in those *To Melancholy*, *On Indolence*, and *On a Grecian Urn*, eleven in *To Autumn*. The stanzas all begin with a cross-rhymed quatrain *abab*, and the remaining lines, which tend to separate from the first quatrain, have, like the sestet of a sonnet, some liberty in the arrangement of their rhymes, though never such as to close with a

[1] *The Hymn*, II, *Poetical Works*, p. 2.

couplet. In this way an effect of complete spontaneity is attained without the sacrifice of symmetry and proportion.[1] The stanza of the ode *To a Nightingale* is distinguished by having its eighth line shortened to three feet, and the sestet rhyme scheme invariable. An interesting comparison suggests itself between this stanza and that of Arnold's *Scholar Gipsy* and *Thyrsis*, one of the most notable metrical inventions of the Victorian Age, a ten-lined stanza rhymed *abcbcadeed*. In Arnold's stanza the shortened line, with its suggestion of weariness and exhaustion, comes earlier, in the sixth place instead of the eighth, but in compensation for this, three rhymes are launched at once, and the *b*-rhyme is the first to be repeated, the *a* being held over for the short line, a more intricate and compact weave, which is fitly rounded off by the enclosed quatrain which follows. In spite of their familiarity, a stanza from each poem may be quoted for purposes of comparison:

> Thou wast not born for death, immortal Bird!
> No hungry generations tread thee down;
> The voice I hear this passing night was heard
> In ancient days by emperor and clown:
> Perhaps the self-same song that found a path
> Through the sad heart of Ruth, when sick for home,
> She stood in tears amid the alien corn;
> The same that oft-times hath
> Charmed magic casements opening on the foam
> Of perilous seas in faery lands forlorn.[2]

> Still nursing the unconquerable hope,
> Still clutching the inviolable shade,
> With a free onward impulse brushing through,
> By night, the silver'd branches of the glade—
> Far on the forest skirts, where none pursue,
> On some mild pastoral slope

---

[1] The following is an analysis of the rhyme schemes, excluding the opening quatrains:

On a Grecian Urn,
Stanzas 1 and 5 *cdedce*
3 and 4 *cdecde*
2 *cdeced*

To Melancholy,
Stanzas 1 and 2 *cdecde*
3 *cdedce*

On Indolence,
Stanzas 1, 2, 3, 4 *cdecde*
5 *cdedce*
6 *cdeced*

To Autumn (eleven lines).
Stanza 1 *cdedcce*
Stanzas 2 and 3 *cdecdde*

[2] *Ode to a Nightingale*, *Poems*, p. 192.

Emerge, and resting on the moonlit pales,
Freshen thy flowers, as in former years,
With dew, or listen with enchanted ears,
From the dark dingles, to the nightingales.[1]

Another type of stanzaic ode is that written in short, neat stanzas, in imitation of Horace, not of Pindar. Many of the short iambic stanzas have been used in this way. An uncommon one is that of Andrew Marvell's *Horatian Ode upon Cromwell's return from Ireland*, a four-foot followed by a three-foot couplet:

But thou the Wars and Fortunes son
March indefatigably on;
And for the last effect
Still keep thy Sword erect;[2]

A similar stanza, without rhyme, consisting of a five-foot and a three-foot couplet, forms the very striking and beautiful metre of Collins's *Ode to Evening*:

O *Nymph* reserv'd, while now the bright-hair'd Sun
Sits in yon western Tent, whose cloudy Skirts,
With Brede ethereal wove,
O'erhang his wavy Bed;[3]

A bolder handling of stanzaic form, that of Spenser's *Epithalamion*, may be taken as initiating the career of that typically English product, the irregular ode. The *Epithalamion* is an elaborate symphonic structure in twenty-four sections, so similar in form that they may almost be called stanzas. Nine of them contain eighteen lines, thirteen nineteen lines, and one seventeen, the last having only seven. The last line of each section is an Alexandrine of slightly varied wording, the rest five- and three-foot with a single exception in the first section, which contains a four-foot line. The first six lines are always rhymed *ababcc* and the sixth is the first three-foot line, two more being distributed among the remaining lines of the section. The variations come mostly in the last half-dozen lines. To the trained ear this gives a pleasure resembling that given by

[1] *The Scholar Gipsy, Poems*, p. 326.
[2] *Horatian Ode, Poems and Letters*, Vol. I, p. 90.
[3] *Ode to Evening, Poems*, p. 273.

a troop of dancers, whose individual traits of form and gesture enhance rather than detract from the harmony of their similar dress and movement.

A further extension of the liberties of stanza treatment carries us far away from the perfect art of Spenser to the amorphous productions of Abraham Cowley, which were the earliest examples of the perfectly free English ode. He called them 'Pindariques', under the false impression that a rejection of the formalities of construction would enable him to reproduce the style and spirit of Pindar in English verse. His odes are built in sections of fairly equal length, few containing less than fifteen or more than twenty lines. The lines vary between three and seven feet with an occasional two-foot, and are bound irregularly by rhyme, couplet, triplet, or crossed. The metre is iambic. As a rule each section both begins and ends with one of the longer lines, though there are exceptions. The lines, having no base, are naturally decided by grammatical divisions and are therefore endstopped, the whole effect being shapeless and tuneless in the extreme. There is also a tendency to an argumentative intellectual movement in the syntax, which has quite a Wordsworthian effect:

> But these fantastique errors of our *Dream*,
> Lead us to solid wrong;[1]

The following section illustrates all these points, and is rather above the average as poetry:

> Great *Janus*, who dost sure my *Mistris* view
> With *all thine eyes*, yet think'st them all too *few*:
> If thy *Fore face* do see
> No better things prepar'd for me,
> Than did thy *Face behind*,
> If still her *Breast* must *shut* against me be
> (For 'tis not *Peace* that *Temples Gate* does bind)
> Oh let my *Life*, if thou so many *deaths* a coming find,
> With thine *old year* its *voyage* take
> Born down, that *stream* of *Time* which no *return* can make.[2]

Dryden, who wrote his odes for music on the same principle, really understood how to make full use of the liberty

[1] *Life*, *Works*, p. Bb 2 b.
[2] *To the New Year*, *Works*, p. Bb 1 a.

he took. The great advantage of verse written without a base is that the movements can be varied in accordance with fluctuations in the emotions and imagery of the theme:

Now strike the Golden Lyre again
A lowder yet, and yet a lowder Strain,
Break his Bands of Sleep asunder,
And rouze him, like a rattling Peal of Thunder:
Hark, hark, the horrid sound
Has rais'd up his head,
As awak'd from the dead,
And amaz'd he stares around.
Revenge, Revenge, Timotheus cries.
See the Furies arise,
See the Snakes that they rear,
How they hiss in their Hair,
And the Sparkles that flash from their Eyes.[1]

The same power refined beyond all suggestion of bombast appears in Collins's fine ode, *The Passions*, where the poet wisely encloses the free and fluid and wayward verses descriptive of the Passions themselves within a framework of fairly strict octosyllabics. In the descriptive sections the response of the metre to the different musical suggestions is very subtle:

But thou, O *Hope*, with eyes so fair,
What was thy delighted measure?
Still it whispered promised Pleasure,
And bad the lovely Scenes at distance hail!
Still would Her Touch the Strain prolong,
And from the Rocks, the Woods, the Vale,
She call'd on Echo still thro' all the Song;
And, where Her sweetest theme she chose,
A soft responsive Voice was heard at ev'ry Close,
And *Hope* enchanted smil'd and wav'd Her golden Hair.[2]

The irregular ode was put to very fine use by both Wordsworth and Coleridge, the former in the *Ode on the Intimations of Immortality*, the latter in *France* and *Dejection*. In both cases, though there is unlimited variety in the comparative length and in the make-up of the sections, the main constituents are still the five-foot and the three-foot line with an occasional Alexandrine.

[1] *Alexander's Feast*, p. 6.

[2] *The Passions, Poems*, p. 283.

This type of verse is seen at its richest and most elaborate in the odes of Francis Thompson, who mingles frequent anapaests with his iambs, and whose rhythms give a marvellous impression of the spontaneous shaping force of passion:

Who made the splendid rose
Saturate with purple glows;
× × /
Cupped to the marge with beaut|y; ‖ a per|fume-press
Whence the wind vintages
Gushes of warmèd fragrance richer far
Than all the flavorous ooze of Cyprus' vats?
Lo, in yon gale which waves her green cymar,
With dusky cheeks burnt red
She sways her heavy head,
Drunk with the must of her own odorousness;
While in a moted trouble the vexed gnats
Maze, and vibrate, and teaze the noontide hush.
Who girt dissolvèd lightnings in the grape?
Summered the opal with an Irised flush?
Is it not thou that dost the tulip drape,
And huest the daffodilly,
Yet who hast snowed the lily,
And her frail sister, whom the waters name,
Dost vestal-vesture 'mid the blaze of June,
Cold as the new-sprung girlhood of the moon
Ere Autumn's kiss sultry her cheek with flame?
Thou sway'st thy sceptred beam
O'er all delight and dream,
Beauty is beautiful but in thy glance;
And like a jocund maid
In garland-flowers arrayed,
Before thy ark Earth keeps her sacred dance.[1]

A further developement along the same lines, a powerful instrument in the hands of genius, may be illustrated from Matthew Arnold's *Philomela*, in which there is no rhyme and the rhythm sometimes loses touch with the iambic, or indeed with any, base:

Dost thou to-night behold
Here, through the moonlight on this English grass,
The unfriendly palace in the Thracian wild?
Dost thou again peruse
With hot cheeks and sear'd eyes
The too clear web, and thy dumb Sister's shame?

[1] *Ode to the Setting Sun*, *Works*, Vol. I, p. 123.

Dost thou once more assay
Thy flight, and feel come over thee,
Poor Fugitive, the feathery change
Once more, and once more seem to make resound
With love and hate, triumph and agony,
Lone Baulis, and the high Cephissian vale?
/ × × / ××
Listen, || Eugenia—
How thick the bursts come crowding through the leaves!
× / × / ×
Again—thou hearest!
× / × / ×
Eternal Passion!
× / × /
Eternal Pain![1]

A few more steps along the same road and we come to the free verse of the moderns, which is no concern of the prosodist.

[1] *Philomela, Poems*, p. 220.

CHAPTER XI

TROCHAIC VERSE

IN the Middle English alliterative verse which was written after the foot system of versification had been introduced into English poetry, the influence of the regular rhythm of continental verse can be noticed. There is a much nearer approach to regularity and to uniformity in the length of lines than we find in Old English alliterative verse. Since the rhythm still depends on the enunciation of the four important words in the line and the subduing of the others, and since such a large proportion of English words, especially of the older ones, are stressed on the first syllable, the prevailing rhythm is naturally the falling one, trochaic or dactyllic.

/ × × / × × / × × / ×
Liggen in London . in lenten, an elles.[1]

/ × × / × × / × × / ×
Kinges and knizstes . shulde kepe it be resoun.[2]

are characteristic lines from *Piers Plowman*. But *Piers Plowman* is among the latest production of a dying tradition. In the rhymed and metrical verse which was destined to prevail, the continental system established itself, and the iambic rhythm steadily gained precedence as the normal English verse rhythm: the trochaic was not accepted, although it would seem to be the simplest blend of foot versification with the characteristic falling rhythm of the older language. In the metrical revival of the sixteenth

[1] *Piers Ploughman, Prologus*, l. 91, p. 4.
[2] *Piers Ploughman, Passus I*, l. 94, p. 11.

century it was towards the perfection of iambic metre that endeavour was directed.

Towards the end of the century, however, the trochaic metre reappeared, first as an accidental slip-over from iambic in the four-foot line, and soon acquired a status of its own. Its acceptance at this time seems to have had some connection with the outburst of song-writing which marked the last decades of the century, and to the close fellowship which existed for a time between poetry and music, extending the needs of metre, and stimulating the search for new forms. Verse in trochaic metre is peculiarly adaptable to the simplest kind of musical accompaniment, in which the strong beats of the tune fall on the stressed syllables, and the ' time ' of the music corresponds to the normal speech movement of the words. For some considerable time trochaic was not used except in songs, and its association with music determined its character. As a song rhythm it differs completely from the heavy hammered rhythm of the falling alliterative line, and it rapidly acquired the lightness and regularity which remained its outstanding characteristics, for the singer's voice is intolerant of harsh clusters of consonants, and the influence of the strong regular beat of music discourages modulation.

But the trochaic never approached the iambic in popularity, even as a song measure, and does not appear at all in the earlier anthologies. That it is not to be found in *Tottel's Miscellany* is perhaps hardly surprising, but neither are there any trochaic poems in the *Gorgeous Gallery* of 1578, nor in the *Handful of Pleasant Delites* of 1584. In *The Phoenix Nest* (1593), *England's Helicon* (1600), and Davison's *Poetical Rhapsody* (1602) the trochaic four-foot line figures with increasing frequency, and a few other forms appear. The four-foot line, complete or curtailed, remained the staple for trochaic verse until the nineteenth century.

Most of the poems in the song-books are written in rhymed couplets, or in couplets grouped in stanzas. But another popular arrangement is the cross-rhymed quatrain of a poem by Thomas Lodge :

Mvses helpe me, sorrow swarmeth,
Eyes are fraught with Seas of languish:
Haplesse hope my solace harmeth,
Mindes repast is bitter anguish.[1]

This, and a stanza by Nicholas Breton, who was one of the most frequent practitioners of the measure, will serve as examples of its graceful, rippling, but rather sing-song character at that period, due not only to absence of modulation, either by feet or pauses, but to the frequency with which foot-division and word-division coincide:

Say that I should say, I loue ye?
would you say, tis but a saying?
But if Loue in prayers mooue ye?
will you not be moou'd with praying?[2]

Sir Philip Sidney, who wrote several poems in the curtailed form, achieves much more variety of movement, and uses spondee, pyrrhic, iamb, and even an occasional dactyl in modulation, sometimes with rather cumbrous effect:

/ × / / \ × /
Niggard | Time threats, | if we | misse
/ / / × × × /
This large | offer | of our | blisse,
/ / / × / × /
Long stay, | ere he | graunt the | same:[3]

/ × × × / (×) × /
Cursed | be my | destenies | all[3]
/ × / \ / × /
In a Groaue most rich of shade,
× / / × / × /
Where birds wanton musique made;
/ × / × / / / ×
May, || then | young, || his | pyed weedes | showing,
/ × / × / (×) / /
New per|fum'd, || with | flowers fresh | growing.[4]

Besides the familiar four-foot line, in couplet and quatrain, other more elaborate, but not very harmonious

[1] *The Sheepheards sorrow, being disdained in loue, England's Helicon*, p. X 2 b.
[2] [*A Report Song in a dreame. . . .*], *England's Helicon*, p. Bb 1b.
[3] *The Sheepheard to his chosen Nimph, England's Helicon*, p. B 1 b.
[4] *Another of Astrophell to his Stella, England's Helicon*, p. T 2 a.

metrical schemes with shorter lines are occasionally found:

Venus | faire did | ride,
siluer | Doues they | drew her,
By the | pleasant | lawnds
ere the | Sunne did | rise:
Vestaes | beautie | rich
opend | wide to | view her,
Philo|*mel* re|cords
pleasing | Harmon|ies.
Euery | bird of | spring
cheereful|ly did | sing,
Paphos | Goddesse | they sal|ute:
Now Loues | Queene so | faire,
had of | mirth no | care,
For her | Sonne had | made her | mute.
In her | breast so | tender
He a | shaft did | enter,
when her | eyes beh|eld a|boy:
Adonis | was he | named,
By his | Mother | shamed,
yet he | now is | *Venus* | ioy.[1]

The thin and tinkling effect is again due to lack of modulation and invariably endstopping. The same kind of straggling stanza, with lines of varying lengths and a confusion of double and single rhymes, is used for several poems in

[1] *The Sheepheards Song of Venus and Adonis, England's Helicon*, p. Y 4 b.

England's Helicon. Lodge uses a very short line, curtailed two-foot, for *Montanus praise of his faire Phœbe*:

Phœbe sate
Sweete she sate,
sweete sate Phœbe when I saw her,[1]

And John Wooton, in *Damaetas Iigge in praise of his Love* mixes iambic and trochaic lines:

Iolly Sheepheard, Sheepheard on a hill
on a hill so merrily,
on a hill so cherily,
Feare not Sheepheard there to pipe thy fill,
/ / × / / / × /
Fill eu|ery Dale, | fill eu|ery Plaine:
\ / × / / /
both sing | and say; | Loue feeles | no paine.[2]

Among the dramatists, the trochaic four-foot line appears not at all infrequently, complete lyrics in trochaic rhythm, or sustained passages in the dialogue, representing one extreme of that continual fluctuation in the four-foot line between iambic and trochaic rhythm, which has already been noticed. The form used is generally the heptasyllabic or curtailed form of Ben Jonson's 'Queen and Huntress, chaste and fair', which is also the metre of many of Shakespeare's most beautiful songs. Shakespeare also uses it often for monologues and addresses to the audience. In the more formal or oracular passages, like the witches' incantations in *Macbeth*, the casket verses in *The Merchant of Venice*, the marriage blessing in *The Tempest*, and the peddler's song in *A Winter's Tale*, the verse is very regular, endstopped, and unmodulated:

/ × / × / × \ ×
Honour, riches, marriage-blessing, ‖
/ × /(×) × × × / ×
Long continuance, and increasing, ‖
/ × / × / × / ×
Hourly joys be still upon you! ‖
/ × / × / × \ ×
Juno sings her blessing on you. ‖[3]

But in the pure lyrics and monologues there is a good deal of modulation and variation of pause, which never disturbs

[1] *England's Helicon*, p. G 2 a.
[2] *England's Helicon*, p. G 1 b.
[3] *The Tempest*, IV, i, 106 ff.

the dancing lightness and delicacy characteristic of the metre:

/ × / × / / /
How should | I your | true love | know→
× × / × \
From an|other | one?
× × / × / × /
By his | cockle hat and staff
× × / × /
And his | sandal shoon.[1]

Here the curtailed four-foot is crossed by curtailed three-foot. Some of the continuous passages in four-foot lines, though not divided into stanzas, are partly cross-rhymed:

And we fairies that do run
By the triple Hecate's team,
From the presence of the sun,
Following darkness like a dream,
Now are frolic: not a mouse
Shall disturb this hallow'd house:
I am sent with broom before,
To sweep the dust behind the door.[2]

In 'Where the bee sucks' trochaic lines are combined with dactyllic and in 'Come unto these yellow sands' with iambic. In

/ × / / × /
Over | hill, | over | dale,
/ × / / × /
Thorough | bush, | thorough | brier,[3]

Shakespeare has lines broken into two halves, each half ending with a monosyllabic foot.

The metre in continuous four-foot lines is a favourite with Fletcher, who also once introduces the two-foot line, achieving a very pretty stanza in this lyric from *The Captain*:

Tell me dearest what is Love?
× × / × × × /
'Tis a | lightning | from a|bove,
× × × ×
'Tis an | arrow, | 'tis a | fire,
× × × ×
'Tis a | boy they call Desire.
× ×
'Tis a | grave,
Gapes to have
Those poore fooles that long to prove.[4]

[1] *Hamlet*, IV, v, 23 ff. [2] *Midsummer Night's Dream*, V, i, 380 ff.
[3] *Midsummer Night's Dream*, II, i, 2 ff.
[4] Beaumont and Fletcher, *The Captain*. *Comedies and Tragedies*, p. 55.

Much of the charm is due to the slight, but skilful, modulations indicated, and especially to the pyrrhics which concentrate attention on the principal words.

Shirley uses the same two lines in a less pleasing combination :

Wood-men Shepheards, come away,
This is Pan's great holy-day,
Throw of cares,
With your heauen aspiring aires
Helpe us to sing
While valleyes with your Ecchoes ring.[1]

Dekker's exquisite lyric, ' Art thou poore yet hast thou golden Slumbers ', which begins apparently in trochaic and turns into iambic metre, has a trochaic refrain :

Worke apace apace apace apace :
Honest labour beares a louely face,[2]

which is interesting as using the five-foot line, so rare in this metre.

Suckling's well-known gay sally from *Aglaura* provides a new stanza form of alternating complete four-foot and curtailed three-foot lines :

Why so pale and wan, fond Lover ?
Prithee why so pale ?
Will, when looking well can't move her,
Looking ill prevaile ?
Prithee why so pale ?[3]

For the same kind of gay trifling he evolved another excellent measure, by reversing the distribution of double and single lines, and alternating curtailed four-foot with complete three-foot :

Out upon it, I have lov'd
Three whole days together ;
And am like to love three more,
If it prove fair weather.[4]

But in the last two stanzas the metre falters and changes ; iambic openings occur ; the last line is lengthened to four

[1] *Schoole of Complement*, p. 73.
[2] *Comedie of Patient Grissill*, p. B 1 a.
[3] *Aglaura*, p. 23.
[4] *Sir J. S. The Last Remains of Sir John Suckling*, p. 2.

feet ; and the impression of engaging self-complacent flippancy is destroyed :

> But the spite on't is, no praise
> × / ×
> Is due at | all to | me :
> Love with me had made no staies,
> Had it | any | been but | she,[1]

Campion's 'Rose-cheeked Laura' is in intention, as he indicates, a reproduction of a Latin metre. But in effect it is in a stanza composed of a three-foot curtailed line followed by two four-foot lines and a two-foot. There is hardly any modulation from the point of view of stress, and the result, considered without reference to the music, is not very pleasing, on account of the absence of rhyme :

> Rose-cheekt | Lawra | come
> Sing thou | smoothly | with thy | beawties
> Silent | musick, | either | other
> Sweetly | gracing.[2]

The dulness is partly due to the frequency with which words coincide with feet.

A pleasanter trochaic poem of his is the one which follows this in the *Observations on the Art of English Poetry*. It begins with a short line of two complete feet, followed by three four-foot lines, and the concluding line is the curtailed one which opens the stanza of 'Rose-cheeked Laura'. This line with its heavy ending, falls more satisfactorily at the end of a stanza than at the beginning, where it seems to arrest the rhythmic flow :

> Iust beguiler,
> Kindest loue, yet only chastest,
> Royall in thy smooth denials
> Frowning or demurely smiling
> Still my pure delight.[3]

One of the most graceful and interesting trochaic poems of the period is an attempt by Drayton to use the metre

[1] *Sir J. S. The Last Remains of Sir John Suckling*, p. 2.
[2] *Observations on the Art of English Poetry*, p. 31.
[3] *Observations on the Art of English Poetry*, p. 32.

for narrative in continuous alternately rhymed 'sevens', in *The Shepherd's Serena*:

The wilde | waters | are waxt hie,
So they | are both | deafe and dumbe,
Lou'd they thee so well as I,
They would ebbe when thou shouldst come;
Then my coate with light should shine,
Purer then the Vestall fire:
Nothing here but | should be | thine,
That thy heart can well desire: [1]

Among the 'Metaphysicals' also, especially in their love poetry, there are occasional trochaic poems. Donne's 'Go and catch a falling star' is in a very interesting stanza, a cross-rhymed quatrain and a couplet of complete four-foot lines, followed by a pair of short iambic lines, and a final line of four feet, which is also iambic except in the second stanza, where it has seven syllables and trochaic movement. The first stanza is as follows:

Goe, and catche a falling starre,
Get with child a mandrake roote,
Tell me, | where all | past yeares | are,
Or who | cleft the | Divels foot,
Teach me | to heare | Mermaides singing,
Or to | keep off | envies stinging,
And finde
What winde
Serves to advance an honest minde.[2]

Crashaw, besides a good many poems in trochaic 'sevens', makes for *Out of the Italian, A Song* a very pretty stanza of the now well-established combination of two- and four-foot trochaics. All the lines are complete, and there is some iambic modulation:

To thy | Lover
Deere discover

[1] *The Shepheards Serena. The Battaile of Agincourt, etc.*, p. 144.
[2] *Song, Poems*, Vol. I, p. 8.

× /
That sweet | blush of thine that shameth
(When those Roses
It discloses)
All the flowers that Nature nameth.[1]

Carew uses four-foot couplets for some of his psalm paraphrases, and, for 'He that loves a rosie cheeke', the stanza of cross-rhymed quatrain with closing couplet, all curtailed. But he also breaks new ground with a triplet combination of 'sevens' that has a distinct charm. In this are written *Good Counsell to a Young Maid* and *To the New Year for the Countesse of Carlisle.* Carew achieves modulation of pause as well as foot:

/ × × × / × /
Gaze not | on thy | beauties | pride,
/ × / × × / /
Tender | Maid, ‖ in | the false | tide→
× ×
That from | Lovers eyes doth slide.[2]

But an entirely new note in trochaic verse is struck by a single poem of George Herbert, *Discipline.* It is written in a stanza of very short lines, two- and three-foot curtailed:

/ × / × /
Throw away thy rod,
/ × / × /
Throw away thy wrath:
/ \ /
O my God,
/ × / × /
Take the gentle path.[3]

The extraordinarily heavy and solemn effect can be traced partly to the invariable endstopping, partly to the absence of the familiar pyrrhic modulation. The line nearly always has its full number of stresses, three among the five syllables in the longer lines, which gives tremendous weight. When the pyrrhic opening does occur, there is often compensating weight of consonants:

× × / × /
And thy book alone.[4]

---

[1] *Delights of the Muses, Poems*, p. 188.
[2] *Good Counsel to a young Maid, Poems with a Maske*, p. 15.
[3] *Discipline, The Temple*, p. 173.
[4] *Discipline, The Temple*, p. 173.

The still shorter line is composed in all cases but one of three monosyllables, which often bear equal weight, or almost so :

Brought thee low,[1]
Thou art God :[2]

For many years the resources of trochaic verse were not further expanded, though it appeared again fitfully among the mechanical versifiers of the eighteenth century. Even Addison, Goldsmith, and Dr. Johnson himself paid their rather stiff-kneed homage to the sprightliest of the prosodic muses. The variety most in vogue in the eighteenth century was the quatrain of seven- or eight-syllabled lines, or of the two combined, as they are in the sweetest flower of a somewhat arid field, Watts's *Cradle Hymn* :

Hush ! || my | dear, || lie | still and slumber ;
Holy angels guard thy bed !
Heav'nly blessings without number
Gently falling on thy head.[3]

The quatrain of four-foot lines appears also in the hymn-books, mostly in the curtailed form, as in Charles Wesley's ' Jesu lover of my soul ' and Toplady's ' Rock of Ages '. But in the mixed stanza it gives us the gorgeous ' Lo He comes with clouds descending '.

Into the love poetry of the period trochaics often bring an echo of Elizabethan song. In the following lines by Lord Lansdowne there is a distinct resemblance to the poem of Lodge quoted on p. 231 :

Thoughtful Nights, and restless Waking,
Oh, the Pains that we endure !
Broken Faith, unkind Forsaking,
Ever doubting, never sure.[4]

Trochaic verse lends itself very readily, on account of its great metrical regularity, to the mechanical effect which so often besets the poetry of the eighteenth century, and the

[1] *Discipline, The Temple*, p. 174.
[2] *Discipline, The Temple*, p. 174.
[3] *A Specimen of Moral Songs, Works*, Vol. IV, p. 312.
[4] *To Mira, Works*, Vol. I, p. 89.

trochaics of the period are seldom very subtle or interesting. But the jogtrot may be exactly the effect desired, as it is in this very successful stanza form which Gay used in *The Beggar's Opera*, a combination of shortened four-foot and two-foot lines and full three-foot lines, with a final line which tends to expand into dactyls :

Youth's the Season made for Joys,
Love is then our Duty,
She alone who that employs,
Well deserves her Beauty.
Let's be gay,
While we may,
/ × × / × × / × × /
Beauty's a Flower, despis'd in decay.[1]

Addison's *Rosamund*, which has very little depth in its poetry, being merely the libretto of an opera, often breaks into short passages of rapid, flippant, short-lined trochaics, well expressive of the giddy whirl of sentiment :

Sweet Delusion,
Gay Confusion,
All a Vision, all a Dream![2]

and even in places makes use of the single-foot line :

Turning,
Burning,
Changing,
Ranging,[3]

The Romantic poets brought fresh life into the trochaic as into other forms of verse, though not until their leaven had been at work some time do the results appear here. Burns makes surprisingly little use, for a song writer, of this eminently singing rhythm, and when he does use it, he is by no means always successful, especially as he generally chooses it for the embodiment of a wild or pensive theme, and the wonderful fluency and swiftness of his diction combine with the natural lightness, buoyancy, and neatness of the trochaic rhythm to produce an effect quite out of harmony with the subject. The metre of *Strathallan's Lament*, for instance, is essentially cheerful and

[1] *Beggar's Opera*, p. 23. [2] *Rosamund*, p. 19. [3] *Rosamund*, p. 8.

vigorous, while the tone of the sentiment is typified by the following lines :

Thickest night, surround my dwelling!
Howling tempests, o'er me rave!
Turbid torrents wintry-swelling,
Roaring by my lonely cave!

Ruin's wheel has driven o'er us:
Not a hope that dare attend,
The wide world is all before us,
But a world without a friend.[1]

We have the same indecorous effect, as of dancing to a funeral, in the poems of despairing or bereft love, 'Raving winds around her blowing' and 'Musing on the roaring ocean'. In one instance, however, 'Ae fond Kiss', Burns has enlarged the resources of the trochaic, using the complete four-foot line in couplets to express quite adequately poignant desolation and regret, though we may hardly agree with Mrs. Jameson that 'these lines contain the essence of an existence of pain and pleasure, distilled into one burning drop':[2]

/ / /
Ae fond kiss, and then we sever!
/ \ /
Ae farewell, and then for ever!
/ \ /
Deep in heart-wrung tears I'll pledge thee,
Warring sighs and groans I'll wage thee.

× ×
Had we | never lov'd sae kindly,
× ×
Had we | never lov'd sae blindly,
Never | met— || or | never parted—
× ×
We had | n'er been broken-hearted.[3]

The better success here is not to be explained altogether by greater skill in modulation, but partly by the choice of the complete line rather than the curtailed, and a good deal more by the diction, which is much heavier than Burns's

[1] *Strathallan's Lament*, *Poetry*, Vol. III, p. 13.
[2] *Loves of the Poets*, Vol. II, p. 205.
[3] 'Ae fond Kiss', *Poetry*, Vol. III, p. 205.

wont, admitting many consonant clusters, and slowed down with frequent long vowels. The swift jocular effect of Burns's usual handling of the metre is perfectly apt to the subject in *Duncan Gray* (second set).[1]

Burns never used the trochaic except in the most familiar lines and forms. Blake, on the other hand, invented more new stanza forms than any poet before him. The trochaic metre, with its simple strongly marked rhythm, is the chief technical means by which Blake obtains his characteristic infantine effect, and gives the impression of speaking through the lips of a child. The most common, however, of Blake's song measures is still the cross-rhymed quatrain of 'sevens' which we find in the introductory poem to *Songs of Innocence*:

> Piping down the valleys wild,
> Piping songs of pleasant glee,
> On a cloud I saw a child,
> And he laughing said to me:[2]

Blake makes much use of the pyrrhic foot, and of internal pause and overflow. The same metre, quite freely handled, reappears in *A Dream*, *On Another's Sorrow*, and several other poems. In *The Lamb* the lines are rhymed in couplets and each stanza is introduced by a pair of lines, which, at first sight, might seem to be three-foot:

> Little Lamb, who made thee?
> Dost thou know who made thee?[3]

But from the tendency, which can hardly be avoided, to slow down the movement at the ends of the lines, it seems that they are better treated as four-foot lines with two monosyllabic feet:

> Little | Lamb, who | made | thee?
> Little | Lamb, I'll | tell | thee.[3]

This scansion is the more justifiable, as we find Blake

[1] *Poetry*, Vol. III, p. 215.
[2] *Songs of Innocence*, Introductory Poem, *Poetical Works*, p. 65.
[3] *The Lamb*, *Poetical Works*, p. 67.

using undoubted monosyllabic feet in other poems in the same metre, for instance in the two *Cradle Songs*:

/ / / × /
Sweet | dreams, | form a shade
/ × / × / × /
O'er my | lovely | infant's | head ; [1]

/ / / × /
Sleep ! | sleep ! | beauty bright,
/ × \ × / × /
Dreaming | o'er the | joys of night ; [2]

The quatrain of four-foot lines which fluctuate between iambic and trochaic rhythm is very characteristic of Blake, and is seen in *The Poison Tree* and *The Tiger*. In the latter, the balance is distinctly towards the trochaic, with occasional undoubted changes to iambic rhythm:

/ × / × / × /
Tiger ! Tiger ! burning bright
× × / × × × /
In the forests of the night,
/ × / × / × /
What immortal hand or eye
/ / / / × / × ×
Dare frame | thy fear|ful sym|metry ? [3]

The line

Little Lamb, who made thee ?

has a quite different effect from the really three-foot line of *The Blossom*, which is combined with two-foot lines as follows:

Merry, | merry | sparrow !
Under | leaves so | green,
× / ×
A happy | blossom
Sees you, | swift as | arrow,
Seek your | cradle | narrow
Near my | bosom. [4]

The shortened three-foot line of some of the *Songs of Experience* is much less musical, but has an effect often both primitive and powerful, and is the most original of Blake's contributions towards the developement of the metre.

[1] *Songs of Innocence, Poetical Works*, p. 71.
[2] *Songs from the Rossetti MS., Poetical Works*, p. 113.
[3] *The Tiger, Songs of Experience, Poetical Works*, p. 85.
[4] *The Blossom, Songs of Innocence, Poetical Works*, p 73.

There are many light or amphibrachic openings, but they never give the impression of an intrusion of iambic rhythm :

Seven nights they sleep
× /
Among | shadows deep,
× / ×
And dream they | see their child
Starv'd in desert wild.

Pale, thro' pathless ways
× / ×
The fancied | image strays
Famish'd, weeping, weak,
× / ×
With hollow | piteous shriek.[1]

In *A Little Girl Lost* a quatrain of lines like the above is closed awkwardly with a five-foot line :

In an Age of Gold
Free from winter's cold,
Youth and maiden bright
To the holy light,
Naked | in the | sunny | beams de|light.[2]

In the poem *Spring*, Blake gains a charmingly gay and infantine effect with the shortened two-foot line, eight times repeated, and followed by a longer line of rather uncertain rhythm, which may, however, be scanned as trochaic with seven feet :

Little boy,
Full of joy ;
Little girl,
Sweet and small ;
Cock does crow,
So do you ;
Merry voice,
Infant noise,
× × / × × × / × \ × ´
Merri|ly, ∧ | merri|ly, to | welcome | in the | year.[3]

Wordsworth, who was an ingenious contriver of new stanza forms out of well-known line-units, used a number of combinations of the trochaic four-foot, of which the most

[1] *The Little Girl Found, Songs of Experience, Poetical Works*, p. 90.
[2] *A Little Girl Lost, Songs of Experience, Poetical Works*, p. 103.
[3] *Spring, Songs of Innocence, Poetical Works*, p. 70.

interesting in its new arrangement of familiar elements is that of *To the Small Celandine*:

> Pansies, lilies, kingcups, daisies,
> Let them live upon their praises;
> Long as there's a sun that sets
> Primroses will have their glory:
> Long as there are violets,
> They will have a place in story;
> There's a flower that shall be mine,
> 'Tis the little Celandine.[1]

The charm of this stanza begins in the fourth line, whose rhyme disappoints expectation, and at the same time arouses it anew. But the trochee leads Wordsworth all too readily into a 'jigging vein', and is often as badly out of harmony with his subject as in some of the songs of Burns. This happens especially when he turns it to the use of narrative, as in *The Horn of Egremont Castle*, which repeatedly trips over the brink of the absurd:

> 'Sir!' the Ruffians said to Hubert,
> 'Deep he lies in Jordan flood.'
> Stricken by this ill assurance,
> Pale and trembling Hubert stood.
> 'Take your earnings.'—O! that I
> Could have *seen* my Brother die!
> It was a pang that vexed him then
> And oft returned, again, and yet again.[2]

The fact that the last two lines, which are iambic, partake of the same unfortunate effect, shows, however, that the metre is not wholly responsible here. One of the most successful of Wordsworth's trochaic poems is the *Song for the Spinning Wheel*, in which the regular beat of the trochaic rhythm, imposed on a diction of more than usually uneven speed, gives the same impression as the regular motion of the spinner's foot, heard through the fluctuating hum of the wheel:

> Swiftly turn the murmuring wheel!
> Night has brought the welcome hour,
>
> When the | weary fingers feel→
> Help, ‖ as | if from faery power;

[1] *Poetical Works*, p. 160.
[2] *The Horn of Egremont Castle*, *Poetical Works*, p. 535.

Dewy | night o'er|shades the ground ;
Turn the | swift wheel | round and round ! [1]

The Romantic poets of the second generation all made frequent use of the mixed 'sevens', not divided into stanzas, but rhymed in couplet and quatrain, and interspersed occasionally with definite iambic and definite trochaic lines. These can be tuned either to the gay and lively note of Keats's 'odes' of 1818 and of 'Ariel to Miranda', or to the melancholy of Shelley's *Lines Written among the Euganean Hills*, or to the rather trite pathos of Byron's *Maid of Athens*, which is divided, however, into stanzas. Much of the lyrical part of Shelley's *Prometheus* is in 'sevens', but one of the most beautiful and striking passages is in stanzas of complete four-foot lines with much variety of pause and some substitution, which give it a freedom and ethereal wildness unfamiliar in the trochaic metre, but very characteristic of Shelley :

Life of | Life ! || thy | lips enkindle→
With their | love the breath between them :
And thy smiles before they dwindle
Make the | cold air | fire ; || then | screen them→
In those | looks, || where | whoso gazes→
Faints, || en|tangled | in their | mazes.[2]

The same freedom of modulation, and the same habit of overflow characterise the metre of *To a Skylark*, though the shorter lines of which it is composed, in combination with a longer iambic line, do not admit such sustained rhythmic flights. Either in the complete or shortened form of the line, some of the stanzas show Shelley at his highest pitch of lyrical ecstasy :

Higher still and higher
From the earth thou springest
Like a cloud of fire ;

[1] *Song for the Spinning Wheel*, *Poetical Works*, p. 163.
[2] *Prometheus Unbound*, Act II, Sc. v, *Poetical Works*, p. 237.

× /
The blue | deep thou wingest,
And singing still dost soar, and soaring ever singest. [1]

Waking or asleep,
Thou of death must deem
Things more true and deep
Than we mortals dream,
/ × / \
Or how | could thy | notes flow | in such a crystal stream ? [2]

The trochee, which is the base of the short line, occasionally breaks in as a modulation in the iambic line, and once or twice the rhythm changes in the shorter lines also:

We look before and after,
And pine for what is not; [3]

Tennyson uses the common four-foot line or the 'sevens' in many of his juvenilia, but nearly always as an ingredient only in a poem of variable measure. Iambic and trochaic alternate in *The Lady of Shalott*. We pass from

/ / / \
On ei|ther side | the riv|er lie
/ / × / × × × /
Long fields | of bar|ley and | of rye, [4]

to

/ / / /
Only | reapers, | reaping | early
\ \ / /
In a|mong the | bearded | barley, [5]

He tried it for narrative in *The Captain* and *The Lord of Burleigh*, but had little better success than Wordsworth. Tennyson's great contribution to the history and developement of trochaic metre is of course the couplet of eight-foot lines curtailed, which is now known as the *Locksley Hall* metre. But the formation is not so original as at first sight it seems. When read aloud the lines show an almost constant tendency to break up, owing to the fall of

[1] *To a Skylark*, *Poetical Works*, p. 596.
[2] *To a Skylark*, *Poetical Works*, p. 597.
[3] *To a Skylark*, *Poetical Works*, p. 598.
[4] *The Lady of Shalott*, *Works*, p. 27.
[5] *The Lady of Shalott*, *Works*, p. 28.

the phrases, into the familiar pair of four-foot complete, and four-foot curtailed:

Comrades, leave me here a little, || while as yet 'tis early morn:
Leave me here, and when you want me, || sound upon the bugle horn.
'Tis the place, and all around it, || as of old, the curlews call,
Dreary gleams about the moorland || flying over Locksley Hall;[1]

But the moving of the pause half a foot back alters the rhythm completely, and produces an effect that could hardly be obtained by the pair of shorter lines:

For I dipt into the future, far as human eye could see;
Saw the Vision | of the | world, || and | all the wonder that would be.[2]

The sudden pause, though only half a foot earlier than we have come to expect it, and the concentration of weight on 'world' by the preceding pyrrhic, enrich the expressiveness of the words, by enforcing the image of a seeker suddenly checked in amazement before a tremendous vista. This pause, falling within the fourth foot, is the commonest variation from the stereotyped break illustrated above. The more subtle play of phrase in the following couplets shows to what varied and expressive effects the metre may lend itself, though Tennyson does not often explore them:

Love took up the harp of | Life, || and | smote on all the chords with might;
Smote the chord of | Self, || that, || trembling, || pass'd in music out of sight.[3]
Follow | you the | Star that | lights a | desert | pathway, || yours or mine.
Forward, || till you see the highest Human Nature is divine.[4]

There is very little foot-modulation. A tremendous indignant sweep and onset seems to be the effect generally aimed at, and any reversal of rhythm, or even the lapse of stress in the pyrrhic, destroys the forward rush. At its highest pitch of indignation and energy the metre seems to

[1] *Locksley Hall*, *Works*, p. 98.
[2] *Locksley Hall*, *Works*, p. 101.
[3] *Locksley Hall*, *Works*, p. 98.
[4] *Locksley Hall, Sixty Years After*, *Works*, p. 568.

uphold the movement across grammatical phrase divisions which would suggest a pause:

Cursed be the social wants that sin against the strength of youth!
Cursed be the social lies that warp us from the living truth![1]

In *Locksley Hall Sixty Years After* there is a good deal of dactyllic substitution which does not retard the movement, but seems to help the rather snarling effect of some of the lines:

/ × × / × × / × × / × ×
Authors—essayist, atheist, novelist, realist, rhymester, play your part,[2]

/ × × / × ×
Down with Reticence, down with Reverence,—forward—naked—let them stare.[3]

A more interesting appearance of the trochee in Tennyson is that in the last section of *The Lotos-Eaters*. The lines which begin with

The Lotos blooms below the barren peak,[4]

glide almost imperceptibly into a trochaic rhythm, which is sustained till the last two lines, where it is resolved into iambic for the close. The trochaics begin:

× × / × /
We have | had e|nough of | action, | ∧ | and of motion we,
Roll'd to | starboard, | roll'd to | larboard, | when the | surge was | seething | free,[5]

The lines are rhymed in triplets, and vary in length between seven and eight feet. The seven-foot lines have often a rather marked pause after the fourth foot, which tends to be lengthened so as to give the shorter line about the same time-value as the longer. But the irregular mingling of the two kinds of line has an uneasy effect which contributes to the impression, at once restless and listless, which is so well in keeping with the feeling expressed.

Matthew Arnold has an original and very beautiful and

[1] *Locksley Hall*, *Works*, p. 99.
[2] *Locksley Hall, Sixty Years After*, *Works*, p. 564.
[3] *Locksley Hall, Sixty Years After*, *Works*, p. 564.
[4] *The Lotos-Eaters*, *Works*, p. 56.
[5] *The Lotos-Eaters*, *Works*, p. 56.

effective stanza for part of *Tristram and Iseult.* It is in complete five-foot lines, a quatrain rhymed only in the second and fourth lines; though, quite often (as in the first stanza to be quoted), the two unrhymed lines assonate. The effect throughout is one of mournful weariness, with an echo of spent passion heard through the grief and pain which remain:

> Raise the light, my Page, that I may see her.—
> Thou art come at last then, haughty Queen!
> Long I've waited, long I've fought my fever:
> Late thou comest, cruel thou hast been.
>
> Tristram, for the love of Heaven, speak kindly!
> What, I hear these bitter words from thee?
> Sick with grief I am, and faint with travel—
> Take my hand—dear Tristram, look on me![1]

Browning has more to say in trochaics than anyone else. He always showed himself skilful in taming the less supple metres to the expression of wonderfully varied material, intellectual as well as emotional, and he uses trochees in all varieties of line from eight-foot to two-foot. The *Locksley Hall* line appears in *Home Thoughts from the Sea* with the same tendency to caesural pause, but with less monotony of rhythm, rhymed seven times on one sound. The same line is used with somewhat different effect in *A Toccata of Galuppi's.* The movement of *Home Thoughts from the Sea* is slow and stately, with frequent pauses other than the caesural one. A good deal of modulation breaks the monotonous tramp of the long line:

> Nobly, nobly Cape Saint Vincent to the North-west died away;
> Sunset | ran, one | glorious | blood-red, | reeking | into | Cadiz bay;
> Bluish 'mid the burning water, full in face Trafalgar lay;[2]

In *A Toccata of Galuppi's* the lines are grouped in triplets, and there is much pyrrhic modulation, which softens the monotonous insistence of the base, and also gives speed. The pyrrhics tend to occur regularly at every second foot:

> O Galuppi, Baldassaro, this is very sad to find!

[1] *Tristram and Iseult, Poems,* p. 150.
[2] *Home Thoughts from the Sea, Poetical Works,* Vol. I, p 273.

I can hardly misconceive you; it would prove me deaf and blind;
But although I take your meaning, 'tis with such a heavy mind![1]

The six-foot line is used for *Love among the Ruins* alternately with a curtailed two-foot, on the same rhyme, which has the effect of an echo. Pause variation and overflow, together with variations in the intensity of the stresses and in the position of the pitch climax of the phrases, are responsible for the simple effect of speech which this poem gives:

But he | looked up|on the | city, every side,
Far and wide,
All the mountains topped with temples, all the glades'
Colonnades,
All the causeys, bridges, aqueducts,—and then,
All the men![2]

The six-foot line in *Before* is less successful. This is one of the instances in which the trochee keeps its trivial movement in spite of serious content. Perhaps the most interesting of all Browning's experiments in the metre is the dedicatory poem to *Men and Women*. In *One Word More* Browning has used the five-foot line with a certain measure of success, and quite a different effect from Arnold and Swinburne. There is no rhyme, and the lines are almost invariably endstopped, but there is a fair amount of modulation, chiefly in the position of internal pause, and the effect, except for a few sudden flights to the stars, like

Silent silver lights and darks undreamed of,[3]

is easy and supple, pedestrian and colloquial, as it was meant to be:

I shall never, in the years remaining,
Paint you pictures, no, nor carve you statues,
Make you music that should all-express me;
So it seems: I stand on my attainment.
This of verse alone, one life allows me;
Verse and nothing else have I to give you.
Other heights in other lives, God willing:
All the gifts from all the heights, your own, Love![4]

[1] *A Toccata of Galuppi's*, *Poetical Works*, Vol. I, p. 266.
[2] *Love among the Ruins*, *Poetical Works*, Vol. I, p. 262.
[3] *One Word More*, XVIII, *Poetical Works*, Vol. I, p. 549.
[4] *One Word More*, VII, *Poetical Works*, Vol. I, p. 548.

The common four-foot line in double quatrains is the metre of *Cristina* and the *Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister*: both show Browning's marvellous power of moulding speech on a stiff and rigid base. The base of the *Soliloquy* especially is one which is very apt to become mechanical, and to subjugate speech-rhythm altogether. To uphold his speech-rhythm against it Browning admits a good many spondees and iambs, and slackens his diction to the utmost looseness of colloquialism, but the violence of the conflict between diction and metre vitalises the contrast between the monk's searing malice and the monastic suavity under which it lies concealed:

GR-R-R—there go, my heart's abhorrence!
Water | your damned | flower-pots, do!
If hate | killed men, | Brother | Lawrence,
God's blood, | would not | mine kill | you![1]

The curtailed line, in an original stanza rhyming *ababa*, is the metre of *A Serenade at the Villa*. A quatrain of very short lines is a fitting vehicle for the mood of exhausted passion in *A Woman's Last Word*. The frequent temptation to retard the ends of the longer lines in reading suggests the following as a more representative scansion than the obvious one:

Let's con|tend no | more, | Love,|
Strive nor | weep:
All be | as be|fore, | Love,
—Only sleep![2]

But it is not natural for all the stanzas, as for instance, in

When the | apple | reddens
Never pry—
Lest we | lose our | Edens,
Eve and I.[2]

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[1] *Soliloquy of the Spanish Cloister*, *Poetical Works*, Vol. I, p. 254.
[2] *A Woman's Last Word*, *Poetical Works*, p. 259.

The stanza of *In a Year*, which is longer, but also composed of very short lines, and has a rather complex rhyme-scheme, teases the ear because lines of the same length never rhyme together, and wonderfully enforces the idea of baffled inability to harmonise:

3A Never any more,
2B While I live,
4C Need I hope to see his face
2A As before.
3D Once his love grown chill,
2B Mine may strive:
4C Bitterly we re-embrace,
2D Single still.[1]

Swinburne uses trochaics quite often, though not with such variety of effect as Browning, and with a preference for the long lines. He has the Locksley Hall line, rhymed in triplets, and with varied and supple cadence, for some passages in *Erechtheus*:

Day to day makes answer, || first to | last, || and | life to | death; || but | I,
Born for death's sake, die for life's sake, if indeed this be to die,
This my doom that seals me deathless till the springs of time run dry.[2]

In *Athens* there are passages of six-foot complete lines alternating with six-foot curtailed, but the result is not of the most harmonious:

Ye that bear the name about you of her glory,
Men that wear the sign of Greeks upon you sealed,
Yours is yet the choice to write yourselves in story
Sons of them that fought the Marathonian field.[3]

The seven-foot line also occurs in *Athens* and in *Grace Darling*. His five-foot trochaics, alternately complete and curtailed, in *By the North Sea*, have a similar effect to Arnold's shorter stanza in the same combination:

Death, and change, and darkness everlasting,
Deaf, that hears not what the daystar saith,
Blind, past all remembrance and forecasting,

[1] *In a Year, Poetical Works*, p. 293.
[2] *Erechtheus, Poems*, Vol. IV, p. 375.
[3] *Athens, Poems*, Vol. V, p. 199.

Dead, past memory that it once drew breath;
These, above the washing tides and wasting,
Reign, and rule this land of utter death.[1]

The curtailed line alone is used in a Roundel, *Aperotos Eros*, with similar effect:

Strong as death, and cruel as the grave,
Clothed with cloud and tempest's blackening breath,
Known of death's dread self, whom none outbrave.[2]

Rossetti seldom wrote in trochaics, but his *Troy Town*, with its curious iambic refrain, is notable for the frequency of trisyllabic feet, giving a rather unusual quality to the common four-foot line:

'Mine are | apples | grown to the | south,
(*O Troy Town!*)
Grown to | taste in the | days of | drouth,
Taste and | waste to the | heart's de|sire:
Mine are | apples | meet for his | mouth.'
(*O Troy's down,*
Tall Troy's on fire!)[3]

Arthur Hugh Clough in an early poem, *ἐπὶ Λάτμῳ*, hit upon a kind of free verse which is mainly trochaic in character with occasional lines of uncertain movement, and contains long stretches of unrhymed trochaic 'sevens'. It is a dreary inexpert metre, but interesting because of its groping resemblance to the Hiawatha metre:

And I | watch: the | orb be|hind
As it | fleeteth, faint and fair
In the | depth of azure night,
In the | violet blank, I trace
By an | outline faint and fair
Her whom none but I beheld.
By her orb she moveth slow,

[1] *By the North Sea, Poems*, Vol. V, p. 104.
[2] *Aperotos Eros, Poems*, Vol. V, p. 184.
[3] *Troy Town, Poetical Works*, p. 306.

Graceful-slow, serenely firm,
Maiden-Goddess! while her robe
The adoring planets kiss.
× / / / (×) ×
And | I too | cower and | ask,
Wert thou mine, and was I thine?[1]

The metre of *Hiawatha* is said to have been suggested to Longfellow by Schiefner's German version (1852) of the Finnish epic *Kalevala*. But Longfellow had been accustomed to use the trochaic metre in stanzas like that of 'Tell me not in mournful numbers'. He had used the Locksley Hall metre for *The Belfry of Bruges* and *Nuremberg*, and in the 'Carillon' to the former, which is partly unrhymed, he comes very near to the Hiawatha metre, continuous unrhymed four-foot trochaics:

In the ancient town of Bruges,
In the quaint old Flemish city,
As the evening shades descended,
Low and loud and sweetly blended,[2]

The appearance of the rhyme, however, at once destroys the resemblance. In 1885 Longfellow produced *Hiawatha*, which deserves attention as the longest original poem in trochaic metre which has been written in English. The Hiawatha metre can never be considered one of the great narrative metres; it has too little variety, but it is not at all a bad one for the purpose for which Longfellow used it. There is a primitive suggestion about it which makes it a fit vehicle for the embodiment of ancient child-like legends. Children love and quickly adopt its easy sing-song. Its chief drawback, indeed, seems to be that it is so fatally easy to produce that it encourages prolixity and reiteration, and obscures the main necessity of great poetry, that of profiting by all the resources of language at the same time. It is impossible, however, to tell how far this ease is responsible for the peculiar idiom, with its many repetitions, continually returning upon its own tracks and advancing the narrative so slowly, which is the most marked char-

[1] *ἐπὶ Ἀδριμῳ*, *Poems and Prose Remains*, Vol. II, p. 34.
[2] *The Belfry of Bruges*, *Poetical Works*, p. 54.

acteric of the poem apart from its prosody, and is connected with the metre in the *Kalevala* itself:

Downward | through the | evening twilight,
In the | days that | are for|gotten,
In the | unremembered ages,
From the | full moon | fell Nokomis,
Fell the beautiful Nokomis,
She a wife, but not a mother.[1]

There is very little modulation, except the pyrrhic, and the spondee which is rather frequent in the last place:

Laid his hand upon the | black rock [2]
At the doorways of the West-Wind [3]

It is impossible to attend for long to a story told in this metre. There is too little salience or change. But the monotony is a gently lulling rather than an irritating one.

One of the few poets who carried on the trochaic tune after the same manner was W. E. Henley, who uses it for poems of a very different kind. He uses it in stanzas of the conventional types, but his favourite arrangement is the group of unrhymed lines forming a stanza, which occupies a large place in the collection, *In Hospital*, where it seems directed to enforce the atmosphere of sordid and strenuous agony which is the pervading mood of the poems. The combined violence and monotony, unmitigated by rhyme, are occasionally successful, but the verse is nearly always in peril of becoming something other than poetry:

Lights about you shower and tumble,
And your blood seems crystallising—
Edged and vibrant, yet within you
Racked and hurried back and forward.[4]

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[1] *Hiawatha*, III, *Poetical Works*, p. 119.
[2] *Hiawatha*, IV, *Poetical Works*, p. 123.
[3] *Hiawatha*, IV, *Poetical Works*, p. 121.
[4] *Operation*, *In Hospital*, *Poems*, p. 6.

In a stanza of unequal lines the absence of rhyme is even more noticeable. Henley uses one for a much quieter effect, but almost as far as the former from the well-known dancing trochaic effect:

> Down the quiet eve,
> Thro' my window with the sunset
> Pipes to me a distant organ
> Foolish ditties;[1]

Note.—The recent fortunes of the trochee in translation are deserving of note. The *Kalevala* itself has been twice translated into the four-foot trochaics of the original, in America by J. M. Crawford, and in England by W. F. Kirby. Both translators adopt the primitive idiom and frequent verbal repetitions of the original and fall into the characteristic somnambulant pace, Crawford's version being generally more musical and graceful, Kirby's more vigorous and naif:

> Sable-bearded god of forests,
> In thy hat and coat of ermine,
> Robe thy trees in finest fibers,
> Deck thy groves in richest fabrics,
> Give thy fir trees shining silver,
> Deck with gold the slender balsams,
> Give the spruces copper belting
> And the pine-trees silver girdles,
> Give the birches golden flowers,
> Deck their stems with silver fret-work[2]

> Aged greybeard of the forest,
> With thy pine-leaf hat and moss-cloak
> Dress thou now the woods in linen,
> And the wilds a cloak throw over,
> All the aspens robe in greyness,
> And the alders robe in beauty,
> Clothe the pine-trees all in silver,
> And with gold adorn the fir-trees,
> Aged pine-trees belt with copper,
> Belt the fir-trees all with silver,
> Birch-trees with their golden blossoms,
> And their trunks with gold adornments.[3]

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[1] *Music, In Hospital, Poems*, p. 22.
[2] *Kalevala* (Crawford), Rune XIV, *The Death of Lemminkainen*, Vol. I, p. 190.
[3] *Kalevala* (Kirby), Rune XIV, *Lemminkainen's Death*, Vol. I, p. 140.

The Locksley Hall metre was used by Romesh Chunder Dutt for an English rendering of parts of the Sanskrit epic poetry of the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata*, as it seemed to the translator a nearer approach than any other familiar English metre to the Sanskrit 'sloka' metre of sixteen syllables in which much of the original was composed. The translation is spirited and musical, but the lines show the same tendency as Tennyson's to break after the fourth foot, and the whole technique is very similar:

Rama shall be crowned at sunrise, || so did royal bards proclaim,
Every rite arranged and ordered, || Dasa-ratha homeward came,
To the fairest of his consorts, || dearest to his ancient heart,
Came the King with eager gladness || joyful message to impart,
Radiant as the Lord of Midnight, || ere the eclipse casts its gloom,
Came the old and ardent monarch || heedless of his darksome doom.[1]

[1] *Ramayana*, Bk. II, v, p. 28.

CHAPTER XII

TRISYLLABIC METRES

Anapaestic Verse

THE anapaest as a modulation appeared almost as soon as the iambic foot, and occasional brief anapaestic passages emerge, as it were by chance, among the stumbling attempts of the duller of Middle English versifiers. But as a base the anapaest did not early commend itself for serious poetry ; and not unnaturally, for when it is handled unskilfully nothing can be more childish and jingling.

Early in the sixteenth century Skelton, in *Colin Clout*, uses quite vigorous doggerel anapaests, perhaps not intentionally, for he constantly drops into a three-foot iambic line from the two-foot anapaestic, which is the staple of the poem :

Lyke Aar|on and Ure
The Wolfe | from the dore
To wary | and to kepe
From theyr goost|ly shepe
And theyr spir|ituall lammes
Sequest|red from rammes
And from berd|ed gotes
With theyr heer|y cotes
Set nought | by gold | ne grotes
Theyr names | if I | durst tell [1]

[1] *Colyn Cloute*, pp. A 5 a and b.

But Puttenham in his book on the *Arte of English Poesie*, published in 1589, quotes, though he apparently neither liked nor understood its metre, from a pretty lullaby in four-foot anapaestic lines ending

> For beauty surpassing the azured skie
> I love thee, my darling, as ball of mine eye.[1]

His comment is, ' Thus sayd one in a meeter of eleven very harshly in mine eare '.[2]

And there are some courtly verses in the same measure by Humphrey Gifford published in 1580 :

> Ye gladly would haue me to make you some toy,
> And yet will not tel me whereof I should write :[3]

In *England's Helicon* there is a lyric in dainty four-line stanzas, of which the first and the third are unmistakeably anapaestic, but the second and fourth are either, or must be scanned as dactyllic :

> × × / × × / ×
> Shall I say | that I loue you,
> / × × / ×
> *Daphne* disdainfull ?
> \ × / × × / ×
> Sore it costs | as I proue you,
> / × × / ×
> louing is painfull.[4]

But until the eighteenth century the anapaest was chiefly kept alive in popular verse, for drinking or marching songs, and political rants like the *Leveller's Rant* of Alexander Brome (1648) :

> To the *Hall*, to the *hall*,
> For justice we call,
> On the *King* and his powerful *adherents* and *friends*,
> Who still have endeavoured, but we work their ends.
> 'Tis we will pull *down* what e're is above us,
> And make them to fear us, that never did love us,

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[1] *Arte of English Poesie*, p. 59.
[2] *Arte of English Poesie*, p. 59.
[3] *Somewhat made of Nothing, A Posie of Gilloflowers*, p. L 2 a.
[4] *England's Helicon*, p. Aa 1 a.

We'l *level* the proud and make every degree,
To our *Royalty* bow the knee,
'Tis no lesse than treason,
'gainst freedom and Reason
For our breth|ren to be high|er than we.[1]

The same strain is heard in the anapaests of Canning and others in the *Anti-Jacobin* late in the next century:

From the blood|-bedewed vall|ies and mount|ains of France,
See the Gen|ius of Gal|lic invas|ion advance!
Old o|cean shall waft | her, unruff|led by storm,
While our shores | are all lined | with the *Friends* | *of Reform.*[2]

About the beginning of the eighteenth century, Prior, and many after him, used anapaests for satiric-amorous verses, and society poems, all superficial in sentiment, and of much the same tone as Prior's

Then finish, Dear Chloe, this Pastoral War;
And let us like Horace and Lydia agree:
For Thou art a Girl as much brighter than Her,
As He was a Poet sublimer than Me.[3]

In none of these poems is there much substitution, except that of the iambus at the beginning of a line, so that the anapaestic rhythm is still hard, metallic, and unvaried, though it can be swift and rollicking.

But about half-way through the eighteenth century anapaests began to be used for serious poetry, and for a different kind of subject. Shenstone used them a good deal for comic effects, and his smooth and fluent lines in *The Scholar's Relapse*,

By the side of a grove, at the foot of a hill,
Where whisper'd the beech, and where murmured the rill;[4]

---

[1] *The Leveller's Rant, Songs, etc.*, p. 55.
[2] *La Sainte Guillotine, Poetry of the Anti-Jacobin*, p. 12.
[3] *A Better Answer, Poems on Several Occasions*, p. 78.
[4] *Old Songs and Ballads, Works*, Vol. I, p. 164.

may have suggested to Cowper the measure for his famous *Poplar Field*:

> The poplars are felled; farewell to the shade
> And the whispering sound of the cool colonnade.
> The winds play no longer and sing in the leaves,
> Nor Ouse on his bosom their image receives.[1]

But the measure is not very well suited to either; though the anapaests try to move in a slow and stately manner, they have not lost their traditional sing-song, and Cowper's poem owes its beauty to the diction rather than to the metre.

The anapaest is most characteristically the foot of speed and excitement, and it is this quality, which gave it its broadsheet popularity, which finally justified its triumphant return to literary verse. And it did return, to hold a very high place among the metrical achievements of the nineteenth century.

The commonest and most characteristic anapaestic measure is the four-foot line, rhymed in couplets, though often arranged in stanzas of two, three, or more couplets. We have it thus in *Young Lochinvar* and *Bonnie Dundee*:

> O young | Lochinvar | is come out | of the west,
> Through all | the wide Bord|er his steed | was the best;
> And save | his good broad|sword he weap|ons had none,
> He rode | all unarm'd, | and he rode | all alone.
> So faith|ful in love, | and so daunt|less in war,
> There nev|er was knight | like the young | Lochinvar.[2]

The same galloping motion, but a tenser and more eager speed, is found in the anapaests of Browning's *How we brought the Good News from Ghent to Aix*:

> I sprang | to the stir|rup, || and Jor|is, || and he;
> I gall|oped, || Dirck gall|oped, || we gall|oped all three;

---

[1] *The Poplar Field*, *Poems*, p. 441.
[2] Scott, *Marmion*, Canto V, XII, *Poetical Works*, p. 142.

'Good speed!' || cried the watch, as the gate-bolts undrew;
'Speed!' || ech|oed the wall to us galloping through;
Behind shut the postern, the lights | sank to rest,
And into the midnight we galloped abreast.[1]

The first foot in the line, it will be noticed, is hardly ever a full anapaest, but an iamb in Scott, and an iamb or a spondee in Browning. There are also, in both, some of the heavier trisyllabic substitutions, the cretic and antibacchius, and Scott seems fond of a progressively stressed foot, where the second syllable, though not as light as the first, is not as heavy as the third.

Swinburne, who had more proficiency in dealing with trisyllabic measures than anyone before or since, uses the anapaest in lines of every possible length. A line which may be a single anapaest appears in one of the sections of *A Dark Month*, but as a very large proportion of the lines are cretics, the metre may equally well be considered as a disyllabic two-foot metre with one foot invariably a monosyllable:

Out of sight,
Out of mind!
Could the light
Prove unkind?[2]

Much monosyllabic substitution in the first foot, and iambic in the other feet, changes the speed of the anapaest to a slow swinging motion in the lines of a chorus in *Atalanta*, where the metre is much more significant than the words in creating the character of a rapt and holy chant:

Before | the begin|ning of years
There came | to the mak|ing of man
Time, | with a gift | of tears;

[1] *How they brought the Good News*, *Poetical Works*, Vol. I, p. 250.
[2] *A Dark Month*, XVIII, *Poems*, Vol. V, p. 346.

Grief, | with a glass | that ran ;
Pleas|ure, with pain | for leaven ;
Summ|er, with flow|ers that fell ;
Remem|brance fallen | from heaven,
And mad|ness ris|en from hell ; [1]

From a line of five anapaests, modulated occasionally with shorter feet, he gains a very much lighter effect, resembling the skimming flight of a swallow, partly due to the pauselessness of the rhythm, even where there might be a slight sense pause within the line :

We have seen thee, O love ; thou art fair ; thou art goodly, O Love
Thy wings | make light | in the air as the wings of a dove.
Thy feet are as winds that divide the streams of the sea ;
Earth | is thy cov|ering to hide | thee, the garment of thee.[2]

Out of a longer line, six anapaests, he brings a passionate rush of scorn, indignation and regret in the *Hymn to Proserpine*. The substitution here is chiefly of spondees, which bring weight without decreasing the speed :

O Gods | dethroned | and deceased, | cast forth, | wiped out | in a day !
From your wrath | is the world | released, | redeemed | from your chains|, men say.
New Gods | are crowned | in the city ; | their flowers | have brok|en your rods ;
They are merc|iful, clothed | with pity, | the young | compass|ionate Gods.[3]

In the metre of William Morris's *Sigurd the Volsung*, one of the finest and most original achievements of nineteenth century prosody, though there is no rhyme at the half-line,

[1] *Atalanta in Calydon*, *Poems*, Vol. IV, p. 258.
[2] *Atalanta in Calydon*, *Poems*, Vol. IV, p. 273.
[3] *Hymn to Proserpine*, *Poems*, Vol. I, p. 68.

the pause is constant and part of the structure, one of the few examples of an actual *caesural* pause in English :

Then once | again | spake Sigurd, || once on|ly and | no more :
A pil|lar of light | all golden || he stood | on the Sun|lit floor ;
And his eyes | were the eyes | of Odin, || and his face | was the hope | of the world,
And his voice | was the thund|er of even || when the bolt | o'er the mount|ains is hurled :
The fair|est of all | things fashioned || he stood | 'twixt life | and death,
And the Wrath | of Reg|in rattled, || and the rings | of the Glitt|ering Heath,[1]

As will be noticed in the above lines, it is customary to have an extended foot at the end of the half-line. This is the normal movement and gives a much more full and vigorous rhythm than the alternative, where the half-line ends on a heavy syllable, as in the opening of the poem :

There was | a dwell|ing of Kings || ere the World | was wax|en old ;
Dukes | were the door|wards there, || and the roofs | were thatched | with gold.[2]

Iambs are freely substituted, without impairing the splendid swiftness and vigour of the metre, perhaps the greatest distinctly epic metre in English. The effect may be contrasted with that obtained from the same line without caesural pause by Yeats in the third part of *The Wanderings of Oisin*. The metre is more regular, with occasional spondees, and the effect is the remote burdened motion of a dream :

And we rode | on the plains | of the sea's | edge ; || the sea's | edge bar|ren and gray,

[1] *Sigurd the Volsung*, Book III, p. 153.
[2] *Sigurd the Volsung*, Book I, p. 1.

Gray sand | on the green | of the grass|es and ov|er the drip|ping trees,

Drip|ping and doub|ling land|ward, || as though | they would hast|en away

Like an arm|y of old | men long|ing for rest | from the moan | of the seas.[1]

There is a splendid wave-like swell and sinking of the rhythm in the last line quoted, which culminates in the spondee, and has no other modulation which can be marked, though shades are present to our apprehension.

Swinburne even ventured successfully on an eight-foot line. There is a tendency for every line to break, but not in a regular place:

Ere frost|-flower and snow|-blossom fad|ed and fell, | and the splend|-our of wint|er had passed | out of sight,
The ways | of the wood|lands were fair|er and strang|er than dreams | that fulfil | us in sleep | with delight;[2]

Browning tried with partial success to adapt the anapaestic measure to narrative in *Saul*. He uses the five-foot line, with overflow, which is not common in anapaestic verse. Often the lines are broken with awkward pauses and clogged with heavy and ill-assorted feet in modulation, even the monstrous molossus being fairly frequent:

Would I suf|fer for him | that I love? | So wouldst thou | —so wilt thou![3]

God's own speed | in the one | way of love:[4]

But in description he often succeeds, and in the portrayal of spiritual excitement and exaltation, achieves a combined splendour and swiftness that justifies him in the use of the measure:

There were wit|nesses, || co|horts about me, to left and to right.
Angels, || powers, | the unut|tered, unseen, | the alive, the aware:

[1] *The Wanderings of Oisin, Collected Works*, Vol. I, p. 210.
[2] *March, An Ode, Poems*, Vol. III, p. 169.
[3] *Saul, Poetical Works*, p. 280. [4] *Saul, Poetical Works*, p. 279.

I repressed, I got through them as hardly, as strugglingly there,
As a runner beset by the populace famished for news—
Life or Death. || The whole earth was awak|ened, || hell loosed | with her crews;
And the stars of night beat with emotion, and tingled and shot→
Out in fire | the strong pain | of pent know|ledge : || but I fainted not,
For the Hand still impelled me at once and supported, suppressed
All the tumult, and quenched it with quiet, and holy behest,
Till the rapture was shut in itself, and the earth sank to rest.[1]

It is noticeable that the substitutions are all trisyllabic and therefore heavy, but they are expressive, and are concentrated in the tense climax of the passage, where the emotion and excitement are so packed as almost to break through the mould of metrical form. Even so, they are well ordered, and do not check the rush and impetuosity of the verse.

Effects other than the characteristic ones of motion and excitement can, however, be obtained from the anapaest. Scott, in whose hands the measure springs and leaps through *Lochinvar*, uses the two-foot line to express lamentation in the *Coronach*, or dirge,

He is gone | on the mountain,
He is lost | to the forest,
Like a summ|er-dried fountain,
When our need | was the sorest.[2]

Here it seems to be the double ending which changes the character of the measure, about which in all its other forms there is something determined and heroic, into a vague sighing. But without double ending, without falling away from the strong syllable which comes with such force and finality after the two light ones, Shakespeare, who could do anything, made the anapaest the measure of despair:

Come | away, || come | away, || death,
And in sad | cypress let | me be laid;

[1] *Saul*, *Poetical Works*, p. 280.
[2] *The Lady of the Lake*, Canto III, *Poetical Works*, p. 234.

Fly | away, || fly | away, breath;
I am slain | by a fair | cruel maid.[1]

Blake uses Scott's two-foot line, with iambic openings and without the double ending, for a song of clear, innocent and serene happiness, in *The Echoing Green*:

The Sun | does arise,
And make hap|py the skies;
The mer|ry bells ring
To wel|come the Spring;
The sky|lark and thrush,
And birds | of the bush,
Sing loud|er around
To the bells' | cheerful sound.[2]

And the three-foot line is the measure of the saddest and sombrest of all anapaests, Arnold's in *Rugby Chapel* and *Heine's Grave*. In this form we see substitution carried to its utmost limit. More of the feet are monosyllables, iambs, cretics, and spondees than are anapaests, but we still hear in the funereal march of the lines the firm determined cadence of the long rising foot:

O | strong soul, | by what shore
Tarr|iest thou now? |For that force
Sure|ly, has not | been left vain!
Some|where, || sure|ly afar,
In the sound|ing lab|our house vast
Of be|ing, || is pract|ised that strength,
Zeal|ous, benef|icent, firm![3]

[1] *Twelfth Night*, II, iv, ll. 51 ff.
[2] *The Echoing Green*, *Songs of Innocence*, *Poetical Works*, p 66.
[3] *Rugby Chapel*, *Poems*, p. 422.

Dactyllic Verse

Except as a drift-over from anapaestic rhythm, or in the six-foot line as a definite attempt to reproduce the rhythm of the dactyllic hexameter, little dactyllic verse is to be found in English earlier than the last century.

The essential note of the dactyl is the note of pity and regret, which it has in Hood's *Bridge of Sighs*:

Touch her not | scornfully;
Think of her | mournfully,
Gently and | humanly;
Not of the | stains of her,
All that re|mains of her
Now is pure | womanly.[1]

But the complete dactyllic cadence is rare, because it necessitates the difficult triple rhyme, and the quality of the measure is varied by the omission of one syllable and even more by the omission of two from the last foot. Sometimes the two forms are combined:

Dearer and | brighter than
Jewels and | pearl,
Dwells she in | beauty there,
Maire my | girl.[2]

But the complete two-foot dactyllic line, alternating with the line ending in a trochee, gives us the stirring bugle note of Scott's gathering song:

Pibroch of | Donuil Dhu,
Pibroch of | Donuil,
Wake thy wild | voice anew,
Summon Clan | Conuil.[3]

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[1] *The Bridge of Sighs*, *Poetical Works*, p. 649.
[2] J. K. Casey, *Maire my Girl*, *The Rising of the Moon*, p. 61.
[3] *Pibroch of Donuil Dhu*, *Poetical Works*, p. 731.

Herrick manages to be cheerfully trivial in the same stanza:

Choose me your | Valentine;
Next, let us | marry;
Love to the | death will pine,
If we long | tarry.[1]

and Browning in *Pisgah-Sights* to express disillusionment:

Could I but | live again
Twice my life | over,
Would I once | strive again?
Would I not | cover
Quietly | all of it—
Greed and ambition—
So from the | pall of it,
Pass to fruition?[2]

With a three- and four-foot line stanza, in *Misconceptions*, he voices a half-whimsical, half-tender pity:

This is the | spray the Bird | clung to,
Making it | blossom with | pleasure,
Ere the high | tree-top she | sprung to,
Fit for her | nest and her | treasure.
O what a | hope beyond | measure
Was the poor | spray's, which the | flying feet | hung to,—
So to be | singled out, | built in, and | sung to![3]

Swinburne rejoices in the longer dactyllic lines, but usually with the last foot curtailed to a monosyllable, which often banishes the note of melancholy;

Sun, that hast | lightened and | loosed by thy | might
Ocean and | Earth from the | lordship of | night,
Quickening with | vision his | eye that was | veiled,
Freshening the | force in her | heart that had | failed,[4]

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[1] *To his Mistresse*, *Poetical Works*, p. 32.
[2] *Pisgah-Sights*, II, *Poetical Works*, Vol. II, p. 482.
[3] *Misconceptions*, *Poetical Works*, Vol. I, p. 288.
[4] *Erechtheus*, ll. 95 ff., *Poems*, Vol. IV, p. 344.

A notable freedom from substitution gives Swinburne's dactyls an anapaestic swiftness. The same impression, but with a deeper and more sombre note, and a wonderfully full and free ebb and flow of rhythm, is found in his five-foot lines in a roundel:

Darkness or | twilight or | sunlight may | compass us | round,
Hate may a|rise up a|gainst us, || or | hope may con|found;
Love may for|sake us; || yet | may not the | spirit be | bound![1]

Stevenson has an interesting variety of the five-foot line, in which nearly every line has a paeon in the third place:

Home no more | home to me, | whither must I | wander?
Hunger my | driver, I | go where I | must.
Cold blows the | winter wind | over hill and | heather,
Thick drives the | rain, || and my | roof is in the | dust.[2]

In this we hear again, in spite of the shortened endings, the familiar mournful note of the dactyl.

In Masefield's *Twilight* we find the six-foot line, with monosyllabic close, entirely free from any suggestion of the classical hexameter:

Twilight it | is, || and the | far woods are | dim, || and the | rooks cry and | call.
Down in the | valley the | lamps, || and a | mist, || and a | star over | all.[3]

Swinburne has an eight-foot line, with much trochaic substitution, and internal rhyme which breaks the feet;

England, | queen of the | waves whose | green in|violate | girdle en|rings thee | round,
Mother, | fair as the | morning, | where is | now the | place of thy | foemen | found?

---

[1] *A Child's Future, Poems*, Vol. V, p. 293.
[2] *Songs of Travel*, XVIII, *Poems*, p. 161.
[3] *Twilight, Collected Poems*, p. 68.

Still the | sea that sa|lutes us | free pro|claims them | stricken ac|claims thee | crowned.[1]

Longfellow has a line of the same length, without so much substitution :

Onward and | onward the | highway | runs to the | distant | city, | im|patiently | bearing→

Tidings of | human | joy or dis|aster, of | love and of | hate, ‖ of | doing and | daring.[2]

The pauses on the rhyme are pleasant resting-places in Swinburne's line. Longfellow's pauseless line, with overflow, is exhausting.

Mixed and Doubtful Trisyllabic Verse

Dactyllic verse is, on the whole, inhospitable to modulation, except by the trochee, and when many heavy trisyllabic feet come in, the measure, especially in the two-foot line, is shaken and disturbed out of its own character altogether.

There is a constant and baffling vacillation of the two-foot line towards the three-foot iambic, so that in many poems the base is indistinguishable. By simply weighting the last syllable of the dactyllic line, for instance, we produce a rhythm which scans most naturally as three-foot iambic with the common opening trochee. /×× | /×/ becomes /× | ×/ | ×/:

Youth must with time decay,
Aileen Aroon!
Beauty must fade away,
Aileen Aroon!

---

[1] *The Armada*, VII, *Poems*, Vol. III, p. 208.
[2] *The Golden Legend*, IV, *The Road to Hirschau*, *Poetical Works*, p. 437.

/ × × / × /
Castles are sacked in war,
/ × × / × /
Chieftains are scattered far,
/ × × / × /
Truth is a fixèd star,
/ × × /
Aileen Aroon![1]

The same puzzle occurs in the fine lyric of Beddoes, *Dream Pedlary*:

/ × × / × /
If there were | dreams to sell,
/ × × /
What would you buy?
/ / × / × /
Some cost a | passing bell;
/ × / /
Some a light sigh,→
× / × / / /
That shakes from | Life's fresh crown
/ × × / \ /
Only a | rose-leaf down.[2]

Here the modulation is more varied, and some lines like the fifth above, or

× / × / × /
A cottage lone and still[3]

are pure iambic. That these poems have the characteristic wistful and regretful note of dactyls is no guide to their scansion, for all effects are compassable in iambic metre. Where the iambic movement unmistakeably intrudes, however, it seems to give calmness, dignity, and strength to a measure apt to lose itself in faint sighing.

Another characteristic of dactyllic verse is for a curtailed final foot to be completed by one or more light syllables at the beginning of the next line:

/ × / / ×
Come from deep | glen and
× / × × / ×
From | mountain so | rocky
/ \ × / ×
War pipe and | pennon
× \ × × / ×
Are | at Inver|lochy[3]

---

[1] Gerald Griffin, *Aileen Aroon, Poetical Works*, p. 139.
[2] *Dream-Pedlary. Complete Works*, p. 365.
[3] Scott, *Pibroch of Donuil Dhu, Poetical Works*, p. 731.

/ / × / × /
I saw with | open eyes
/ × / /
Singing birds | sweet
/ × × /
Sold in the | shops
× × / × × /
For the | people to | eat,
/ × × / ×
Sold in the | shops of
× / × × /
Stu|pidity | Street.[1]

A line like

× × / × × /
For the people to eat

found alone would obviously be scanned as anapaestic, and one like

× / × × / ×
From mountain so rocky

might just as well be anapaestic as dactyllic. In both the poems from which these examples are taken the general rhythm is plain, but there is often a real confusion, either on account of this distribution of feet between two lines prevailing through a whole poem, or because of a complete change in one part of a poem from anapaestic to dactyllic rhythm or the reverse.

There is a chorus in Swinburne's *Atalanta* of which the normal movement is anapaestic, in four lines of two feet each, followed by a line of six feet:

/ /
In the ears | of the World
/ /
It is sung, | it is told,
/ /
And the light | thereof hurled
/ /
And the noise | thereof rolled→
From the Ac|roceraun|ian snow | to the ford | of the fleece | of gold [2]

With change of mood, the movement of the short lines changes to dactyllic:

/ × × / × ×
Whence art thou | sent from us?
/ × × /
Whither thy | goal?

---

[1] Ralph Hodgson, *Stupidity Street*, *Poems*, p. 26.
[2] *Atalanta in Calydon*, *Poems*, Vol. IV, p. 326.

Why art thou | rent from us,
Thou that wert | whole,[1]

but the long line reverts to anapaests:

As with sev|ering of eye|lids and eyes, | as with sund|ering of bod|y and soul![1]

In the process of change we find lines composed apparently of amphibrachs, which, since we do not generally use the amphibrach as a base, may be scanned in either way:

Would God he had found me
Beneath the fresh boughs!
Would God he had bound me
Unawares in my house,[2]

Here the short lines reassert, in spite of modulations, the normal base. Francis Thompson's *To a Snowflake* begins thus with amphibrachs:

What heart could | have thought you?[3]

but soon falls unmistakeably into dactyllic measure, with frequent distribution of a foot between two lines:

Fragilely, | surely,
From | what Para|disal
Im|agineless | metal,[3]

The division of the feet changes at the end so that both light syllables to complete the last foot are found at the beginning of the next line, or in other words the lines can be scanned as perfect anapaests; the rhythm changes as the poet proceeds from contemplating the delicate fragility

[1] *Atalanta in Calydon*, *Poems*, Vol. IV, p. 323.
[2] *Atalanta in Calydon*, *Poems*, Vol. IV, p. 323.
[3] *To a Snowflake*, *Works*, Vol. II, p. 203.

of the snowflake to the vast heavy tools with which it was produced :

× / × × /
Insculped and embossed,
× × / × × /
With His hammer of wind,
× × / × × /
And His graver of frost.[1]

The anonymous poem, entitled, in Palgrave's *Golden Treasury, The Great Adventurer* is throughout in a doubtful measure, in which pure anapaestic and pure dactyllic lines are interspersed with lines of amphibrachs, and the difficulties of scansion are increased by not infrequent paeonic substitution :

/ × × / ×
Over the | mountains,
× / × × /
And | over the | waves,
/ × × / ×
Under the | fountains
× / × × /
And | under the | graves ;[2]

So far the impression is dactyllic ; with the second half of the stanza it changes :

/ × / × × / ×
Under floods | that are deepest
× / × × /
Which Nep|tune obey ;
× × / × × / ×
Over rocks | that are steepest
/ × / / × /
Love will find | out the way.[1]

In the third stanza a passage of anapaests and third paeons occurs :

× × / × \ × / ×
But if she whom | love doth honour
× × / × × /
Be conceal'd | from the day,
/ × / × / × / ×
Set a thousand | guards upon her,
/ × / / × /
Love will find | out the way.[1]

---

[1] *To a Snowflake, Works*, Vol. II, p. 203.
[2] *Golden Treasury*, Book II, civ, p. 84.

There is an impression of refrain about the last lines of each stanza, which differ only slightly, and as these are always anapaestic in general rhythm, they seem to reflect their quality over the whole poem, so that the anapaest provides the most satisfactory base for scansion. But the characteristic effect of lightness and fleetness is tempered by the other qualities brought in by the modulation.

One of the most baffling of these mixed anapaestic-dactyllic poems is O'Shaughnessy's famous ode 'We are the music-makers' which is in lines of three feet. Here it is not always possible by the usual allowance of distribution to divide the lines into complete feet, as the following, scanned in dactyls, will show:

× / × × / × × / ×
But we in our | dreaming and | singing,
/ × × / × × /
Ceaseless and | sorrowless | we!
× / × × / × / ×
The | glory a|bout us | clinging
× × / × × / × /
Of the | glorious | futures we | see,[1]

At the end of the first line we have a trochee, at the end of the second, a distributed trochee, at the end of the third, a distributed first paeon. Distribution therefore does not justify the dactyllic scansion. There is a fair amount of substitution of disyllabic feet within the lines and of feet with extra light syllables at the beginning and end of the lines, and modulation and distribution may coincide, as the place of a dactyl is taken by a distributed spondee in the passage from one to the other of the following lines:

× / × × / × × /
And | sitting by | desolate | streams;
/ / × × / × / ×
World-|losers and | world-for|sakers[2]

or by a distributed paeon or trochee in the passage above. Quite a number of lines consist of amphibrachs:

× / × × / × × / ×
For we are | afar with | the dawning[2]

---

[1] *Ode, Life and Works*, p. 101.
[2] *Ode, Life and Works*, pp. 99–102.

but they are not always followed by lines of amphibrachs to make the distribution exact. Many lines which are clumsy scanned as dactyls scan naturally as anapaests:

× × / × × / / /
And a sing|er who sings | no more [1]

while others are as unmistakeably dactyllic:

/ (×) × × / / / ×
Wandering by | lone sea|-breakers [1]

On the whole the general impression seems anapaestic, altered in character by frequent light endings, but with these doubtful poems much must obviously depend on the reader's personal judgment.

[1] *Ode, Life and Works*, pp. 99–102.

CHAPTER XIII

PAEONIC VERSE

THERE is a tendency in some long-lined trochaic verse for the trochees to fall into pairs, of which one has habitually a lighter stress than the other. Trochaic measure easily becomes monotonous, admitting as it does very much less of the usual kind of substitution without losing its character, and it is an effort of the mind to find relief from the too frequent occurrence of stress which brings about the suppression of alternate stresses.

Compare the effect of Tennyson's *Locksley Hall*, where there is no such relief and the rhythm is pure trochaic:

/ × / × / × / × × / × \ × /
Knowledge comes, but wisdom lingers, and I linger on the shore [1]

with the swifter and more fluent run of the opening of Swinburne's ode, *Athens*:

/ × / × / × × × / × / × / ×
Ere from under Earth again like fire the violet kindle,[2]

which establishes the paired trochee rhythm so firmly that it communicates itself to the second line where the stress in normal speech would be almost equal:

/ × \ × / × \ × / × × × /
Ere the holy buds and hoar on olive-branches bloom,[2]

Even more marked is the predominance of alternate stress in Browning's *A Toccata of Galuppi's*, where the heavier stress falls on the even feet:

× × / × × × / × × × / × / × /
O Galuppi, | Baldassaro, | this is very | sad to find!

[1] *Locksley Hall, Poetical Works*, p. 101.
[2] *Athens, An Ode, Poems*, Vol. V, p. 197.

I can hardly | misconceive you ; | it would prove me | deaf and blind ;
But although I | take your meaning | 'tis with such a | heavy mind ![1]

These pairs of trochee and pyrrhic form respectively the first and third paeon, but for the poems like those which we have just examined it is not necessary and may be inconvenient and inexpressive to use the paeon as a base for scansion, especially as at the ends of the lines the rhythm often tends to slow down and the single trochees to assert themselves very definitely, as in the following poem :

I have seen Him | in the watch-fires | of a hundred | circling | camps ;
They have builded | Him an altar | in the evening | dews and | damps ;
I can read His | righteous sentence | by the dim and | flaring | lamps.[2]

But there are other poems for whose correct scansion the admission of the paeon as a base becomes necessary, because they contain trisyllabic and disyllabic feet of evidently equal value with, and used as modulations for, the paeon or double trochee.

Such a poem is Meredith's *Love in the Valley*, of which the base foot is the first paeon :

Under yonder | beech-tree | standing on the | green-sward,
Couch'd with her | arms be|hind her little | head,
Her knees folded | up, || and her | tresses on her | bosom,
Lies my | young love | sleeping in the | shade.

Shy as the | squirrel, || and | wayward as the | swallow ;
Swift as the | swallow when a|thwart the western | flood

[1] *A Toccata of Galuppi's*, *Poetical Works*, Vol. I, p. 266.
[2] J. W. Howe, *Battle-Hymn of the Republic*, *Later Lyrics*, p. 41.

/ × × × / ×2 × / × / × / 3×
Circleting the | surface he | meets his mirror'd | winglets
/ 3× / × × × / 3× / 4
Is that | dear one in her | maiden | bud.[1]

The modulations will be seen to be spondee (1), dactyl (2), trochee (3), especially at the ends of lines, monosyllable in the last place (4), and one peculiar foot, iamb + trochee, which occurs once in the first place (5). The third foot, if no other in the line, is nearly always a complete paeon, but there are exceptions, as in the last line of the second stanza quoted. This follows the usual rule that the later feet in a line are of most importance in establishing a rhythm, the third being the last complete foot in the line.

In paeonic rhythm the time-relationship of the substituted feet with the base foot is more noticeable than in any other type of rhythm. The shorter feet are drawn out in reading 'Lies my | young love' or contain a pause, 'up ∧ and her', 'surface ∧ he', to make them occupy about the same time as the full paeon. This gives a chanting effect, which makes the paeonic rhythm peculiarly fitted for dramatic choruses. One of the choruses in Swinburne's *Erechtheus* begins in first paeons, the rhythm sometimes crossing the line limit, so that a foot is distributed between the end of one line and the beginning of the next:

/ × × × / × × / × \ × / × ×
Who shall put a | bridle in a | mourner's lips to | chasten them
× / × × / × × × / × /
Or | seal up the | fountains of his | tears for | shame?
/ × / × / ×× × / × \ × / ×
Song nor prayer nor | prophecy shall | slacken tears nor | hasten
× them,
× / × / × × / / /
Till | grief be with|in him as a | burnt-out | flame;[2]

The strophe continues in third paeons:

× × / × × / × × /
Till the passion | be broken | in his breast
× × / × × / × × × /
And the might | thereof molten | into rest,[2]

and ends with an iambic couplet.

[1] *Love in the Valley* (First Version from *Poems*, 1851), *Poetical Works*, Appendix, p. 573. [2] *Erechtheus*, *Poems*, Vol. IV, p. 369.

The fine chorus, 'Could I take me to some cavern for mine hiding' in Professor Gilbert Murray's translation of the *Hippolytus*, is in third paeons, with a good deal of substitution, anapaest, trochee, and iamb. The antistrophe is as follows:

× × / × × / × × × / ×
To the strand of | the Daughters | of the Sunset,
× / × \ × / × × × /
The Apple|-tree, the singing, | and the gold;
× × / × × / × × × / ×
Where the mari|ner must stay him | from his onset,
× × / \ × / × × × /
And the red | wave is tranquil | as of old;
/ × / × / × × /
Yea, beyond | that pillar | of the End,
× / × / × × /
That At|las guardeth, | would I wend;
× × / × \ × / × × × / ×
Where a voice of | living waters | never ceaseth
× / × × / × × /
In God's | quiet garden | by the sea,
× / × \ × / × × × / ×
And Earth, the | ancient life-giv|er, increaseth
/ × × × / × × /
Joy a|mong the meadows, | like a tree.[1]

Those sections of Tennyson's *Revenge* not in anapaestic metre admit of a possible scansion on a disyllabic base, but it is only by scanning them as lines of four paeons, broken into half lines by internal rhyme, that two lines like the following are shown to have the same base though their rhythmic similarity is clearly heard:

× / / \ × / × × / × × / ×
Then sware Lord | Thomas Howard: | 'Fore God I | am no coward!
× × / × / × / × × / × / ×
But I cannot | meet them here, | for my ships are | out of gear,[2]

The paeon also supplies a representative scansion for some poems whose hold on metre is slight, because of the imperfect blend between the speech rhythm and the metrical base, such as Lamb's *The Old Familiar Faces*. The substitutions are not always satisfactory and either sense or metre must suffer:

/ × / / × / × × / × / ×
Drinking late, | sitting late, | with my bosom | cronies,[3]

[1] *Hippolytus, Athenian Drama*, Vol. III, p. 39.
[2] *The Revenge, Poetical Works*, p. 507.
[3] *The Old Familiar Faces, Works*, Vol. II, p. 547.

In the above line the feeling for rhythm tempts us to put a stress on 'with' in the third foot. But generally the third, that is the last complete foot, is a first paeon, and gives the base:

/ × × | / × | / × × × / × |
I have had | playmates, | I have had com|panions,[1]
/ × × | / × | / × × × / × |
I have been | laughing, | I have been ca|rousing,[1]
/ × × | / / | / × × × / × |
I loved a | love once, | fairest among | women; [1]

There are however lines which do not contain a single paeon:

/ × × | / × × | / × × | / × |
Ghost-like, I paced round the haunts of my childhood.[1]

a regular dactyllic line, and some have the paeon earlier.

× × / × | / × | × × / × | / × |
In my days of | childhood, in my | joyful | schooldays,[1]

But far more disturbing than the substitution of dactyl and trochee is the third paeon marked above. Again we are tempted to read

/ × × × | / × | / × × × / × |
In my days of | childhood, | in my joyful | schooldays

The paeon is naturally a more flexible base foot than the shorter feet. The same proportional liberty which admits an anapaest or monosyllable as substitutes for an iambus will admit a six-syllabled foot for a paeon and all the lesser feet down to a monosyllable. The resources of the extended paeon are only beginning to be explored, most paeonic verse hitherto having been content with the shorter modulations.

De la Mare's *The Listeners*, recognised by the ear as a masterpiece of metrical skill, but presenting considerable difficulties to scansion, can be scanned on a base of third paeons, tending in the odd lines to complete paeons and the longer substitutes, and in the even lines to the shorter substitutes. Sometimes, in the odd lines the paeon is

[1] *The Old Familiar Faces*, *Works*, Vol. II, p. 547.

weighted with an extra stress, instead of by extra light syllables :

'Is there any|body there ?' said | the Traveller,
Knocking | on the moonlit | door ;
And his horse in | the silence | champed the grasses
Of the forest's | ferny | floor :
And a bird flew | up out | of the turret,
Above | the Traveller's | head :
And he smote u|pon the door a|gain a second time ;
'Is there any|body there ?' he | said.[1]

The line which sounds complete and normal is the seventh, which is in regular third paeons, except for the extra light syllable at the end. And if we alter the others so as to fill up the short feet we can produce the same kind of regular beat, the sign of absolute adherence to the base, for instance, instead of the second line :

(He was) knocking | in the moonlight | (of the) door-(way) |

Even the most difficult lines, scanned on the third paeon base, show how their peculiar effects are gained :

Stood thronging | the faint moonbeams | on the dark stair,[1]
Fell echoing | through the shadowiness | of the still house[1]
'Tell | them I came', and | no one answered,[2]
And how the | silence surged soft|ly backwards.[2]

Such delicate manipulation of the paeonic rhythm is extremely rare ; the very freedom which is gained by the admission of the longer modulations makes it a difficult measure to use, though we may hope that it is only at the beginning of its history and destined to provide a new

[1] *The Listeners, The Listeners, etc.*, p. 69.
[2] *The Listeners, The Listeners, etc.*, p. 70.

instrument for future singers. Meanwhile the more regular paeonic metres are extremely popular, for light verse, humorous and occasional, and almost any week's issue of *Punch* will provide excellent examples of its successful use, while for the new and more robust children's verse, and especially on the pages of A. A. Milne, it is almost the commonest measure:

× / × | × × / × | × × / \ / / |
Sir Brian | had a battle|axe with great big | knobs on;
× / × | × × / × | × × / × × / |
He went a|mong the villag|ers and blipped them | on the head
× / × | × × / × | × × / × × / × |
On Wednesday | and on Satur|day, but mostly | on the latter | day,
× / × | × × / × | × × / × × / |
He called at | all the cottag|es, and this is | what he said;[1]

[1] *Bad Sir Brian Botany, When we were very Young*, p. 92.

CHAPTER XIV

FRENCH FORMS IN ENGLISH VERSE

THE strict French forms, which depend for their charm on repetition and intricate and exacting rhyme-schemes, are traditionally connected with the troubadours and with Provence, though the poems called *Ballades* and *Rondeaux*, which survive from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, are of loose and variable construction, and most of the forms, as we know them in English, were stiffened after their transplantation to Northern France, and took their final shape in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. But the names were at first loosely used in English.

Chaucer speaks of himself in *The Legend of Good Women* [1] as having written ballades, roundels, and virelais. Examples of the first two survive, but they do not always conform to the rules now acknowledged. His ballades mostly consist of three stanzas of rhyme royal, though a few are in an eight-lined stanza, rhymed *ababbcbc*. They correspond to ballades as now written in having the last line the same for each stanza and the same rhyme sounds carried throughout. A few have an envoy of one stanza or a few additional lines, but of the eight or nine poems written in this form not all are *called* ballades.

The poem called *Merciles Beautè—A Triple Roundel* is rhymed *ABBabABabbABB*.[2] The sixth and seventh

[1] *Prologue*, l. 410 or l. 423 (two versions). *Works*, III, 96.
[2] The capital letters represent lines which are repeated verbatim.

lines repeat the first two, and the last three the first three. This form is still used.

Lydgate's and Occleve's Ballades are stanza poems without repetition, but some of the former's *Prayers* have the last line of each stanza alike, and the last stanza is called the envoy. Gower presented to the King fifty ballades written in French. Occleve has some poems called Roundels which consist of a quatrain four times repeated with a prelude to the successive repetitions of two, three, and four new lines.

Wyatt labels as Rondeaux certain poems of his which have the first words of the first line repeated twice in the course of the poem, sometimes as a complete line, sometimes as the beginning of a line. All but one of these have fifteen lines. The Elizabethans, though they exercised their ingenuity on acrostics, or verses of the following type,

> *Beholde* the blast which blowes the blossomes from the tree,
> *The end* whereof, consumes and comes to nought we see;
> *Ere thou* therefore, be blowen from life that may not last,
> *Begin* for grace to call, for time mispent and past.[1]

> *If thou*: delight, in quietnes of life,
> *Desire*: to shoun, from bralls, debate and strife,
> *To liue*: in loue with god, with frend and foe,
> *In rest*: shalt sleepe: when others cannot so.

> *Giue eare*: to all, yet doo not all beleeve,
> *And see*: the end, and then do sentence geeve:
> *But say*: for truth of happy liues assind,
> *The best*: hath he that quiet is in mind.[2]

do not seem to have troubled about the French forms, and after the sixteenth century they fell into oblivion.

But the really important phase in the writing of the ornamental French forms was a brief one in the later years of last century, when a strong interest initiated by Swinburne in his perpetual search for new tests of his metrical ingenuity passed on to Henley, Andrew Lang, Edmund Gosse, and most notably to Austin Dobson. The writing

[1] *Paradise of Daynty Devises*, p. A 3 b.
[2] *Paradise of Daynty Devises*, p. G 3 a.

of such poems, however, as will be seen from the following examples of the most important types, can hardly escape the difficulties of the *tour de force*, and the disadvantages of self-consciousness. This is discernible often in a faint or overt flippancy, or a complacent over-refinement of phrase, and probably accounts for the fact that these poems have been used most commonly for the celebration of blighted and withered passions and the expression of moods of disillusionment and regret, or for sallies of cheerful jauntiness and burlesque.

The most stately and ample of the French forms, and the most popular with the English group, is the *ballade*, which consists of three stanzas of eight or ten lines whose last line is repeated as a refrain, and an envoy with the same refrain of four lines for the eight-line stanza, and five for the ten-line stanza. The envoy is often addressed to a single reader by name. The rhyme-scheme is a very exacting one, as it is repeated in each stanza, *ababbcbC* with envoy *bcbC* for the shorter form, and *ababbccdcD* with envoy *ccdcD* for the longer. There may be double refrain, the fourth line of each stanza, and the second of the envoy, being identical. Swinburne's *Ballad of Dreamland* follows the French custom of alternating double and single rhyme :

I hid my heart in a nest of roses,
  Out of the sun's way, hidden apart;
In a softer bed than the soft white snow's is,
  Under the roses I hid my heart.
Why should it sleep not? why should it start.
  When never a leaf of the rose tree stirred?
What made sleep flutter his wings and part?
  Only the song of a secret bird.

Lie still, I said, for the wind's wing closes,
  And mild leaves muffle the keen sun's dart;
Lie still, for the wind on the warm sea dozes,
  And the wind is unquieter yet than thou art.
Does a thought in thee still as a thorn's wound smart?
  Does the fang still fret thee of hope deferred?
What bids the lids of thy sleep dispart?
  Only the song of a secret bird.

The green land's name that a charm encloses,
  It never was writ in the traveller's chart,

And sweet on its trees as the fruit that grows is,
It never was sold in the merchant's mart.
The swallows of dreams through its dim fields dart,
And sleep's are the tunes in its tree-tops heard;
No hound's note wakens the wildwood hart,
Only the song of a secret bird.

ENVOI

In the world of dreams I have chosen my part,
To sleep for a season and hear no word
Of true love's truth or of light love's art,
Only the song of a secret bird.[1]

The *double ballade* consists of six stanzas of eight or ten lines like those of the ballade, but usually without envoy. The lines of the ballade are generally, but not always, of the same length, and not often less than four feet. Ballades have been written in metres as various as *Locksley Hall* trochaics and three-foot anapaests, but are most usually in four- or five-foot iambic lines. The *chant royal* is similar to the ballade, having three stanzas of eleven lines rhymed *ababccddedE*, and an envoy of five lines *ddedE*, the rhymes being carried throughout, and the final lines of the stanzas repeated to form a refrain.

Of the *rondeau* there are two forms, a longer one derived from Voiture, and a shorter from Villon. The longer form consists of an octave rhymed *abbaaaab*, followed by the first words of the first line as a refrain, then a quintet, *aabba*, with the same refrain. The shorter, and less common, rondeau has a sestet *abbaab*, and a quatrain *abba*, each with refrain as in the longer form.

A variant of the longer form, often chosen by Austin Dobson and others, has the first quatrain *aabb*. That the form can be used without any suggestion of triviality or flippancy is proved by the following example:

Make this thing plain to us, O Lord!
That not the triumph of the sword—
Not that alone—can end the strife,
But reformation of the life,
But full submission to Thy word!

[1] *A Ballad of Dreamland, Poems*, Vol. III, p. 86.

Not all the stream of blood outpoured
Can Peace—the long-Desired—afford;
Not tears of Mother, Maid or Wife . . .
Make this thing plain!

We must root out our sins ignored,
By whatsoever name adored;
Our secret sins, that, ever rife,
Shrink from the operating knife;
Then shall we rise, renewed, restored
Make this thing plain.[1]

To the same nimble and courtly poet are due most of the examples of the shorter form we have in English:

Spring stirs and wakes by holt and hill;
In barren copse and bloomless close
Revives the memory of the rose,
And breaks the yellow daffodil.
Look how the spears of crocus fill
The ancient hollows of the snows,—
Spring stirs and wakes.
Yet what to you are months? At will
For you the season comes or goes;
We watch the flower that fades and blows,
But on your happy canvas still
Spring stirs and wakes![2]

The *rondel* is generally supposed to be an older form of the rondeau, with repetition of whole lines. In early French it had eight or ten lines, later fourteen, and this form is used by Edmund Gosse in his rondel *After Anyte of Tegea*:

Underneath this tablet rest,
Grasshopper by autumn slain,
Since thine airy summer nest
Shivers under storm and rain.

Freely let it be confessed
Death and slumber bring thee gain;
Spared from winter's fret and pain,
Underneath this tablet rest.

Myro found thee on the plain,
Bore thee in her lawny breast,
Reared this marble tomb amain
To receive so small a guest!
Underneath this tablet rest,
Grasshopper by autumn slain.[3]

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[1] *Clean Hands, Poetical Works*, p. 458.
[2] *To George H. Boughton, R.A., Poetical Works*, p. 387.
[3] *Rondel, New Poems*, p. 163.

But Chaucer established in English a thirteen-line form in *Merciles Beautè*, with the rhyme-scheme *ABBabABabbABB*. The first and second lines reappear as the sixth and seventh, and the first, second, and third as the eleventh, twelfth, and thirteenth:

Your yën two wol slee me sodenly.
I may the beautè of hem not sustene,
So woundeth hit through-out my herte kene.

And but your word wol helen hastily
My hertes wounde, whyl that hit is grene,
Your yën two wol slee me sodenly,
I may the beautè of hem not sustene.

Upon my trouthe I sey you feithfully,
That ye ben of my lyf and deeth the quene;
For with my deeth the trouthe shal be sene.
Your yën two wol slee me sodenly,
I may the beautè of hem not sustene,
So woundeth hit through-out my herte kene.[1]

In the form used by Austin Dobson there is less repetition. The first and second lines reappear as the seventh and eighth, and the first as the last, giving a scheme *ABbaabABabbaA*. This form is adopted by Henley:

Beside the idle summer sea
And in the vacant summer days
Light Love came fluting down the ways,
Where you were loitering with me.
Who has not welcomed, even as we,
That jocund minstrel and his lays
Beside the idle summer sea
And in the vacant summer days?

We listened, we were fancy-free;
And lo! in terror and amaze
We stood alone—alone at gaze
With an implacable memory
Beside the idle summer sea.[2]

The *roundel* is a variation of the rondeau used by Swinburne. It has eleven lines, rhymed *abaBbababaB*. As in the rondeau part of the first line becomes the refrain, but it also decides the second rhyme. Swinburne is prone to mere word-spinning, and none of his roundels rings truer,

[1] *Merciles Beautè*, *Works*, Vol. I, p. 387.
[2] *Beside the Summer Sea*, *Bric-a-brac*, *Poems*, p. 76.

or is more finely and firmly wrought than the dedication of his *Century of Roundels* to Christina Rossetti:

Songs light as these may sound, though deep and strong→
The heart spake through them, scarce should hope to please→
Ears tuned to strains of loftier thoughts than throng→
Songs light as these.

Yet grace may set their sometime doubt at ease,
Nor need their too rash reverence fear to wrong→
The shrine it serves at and the hope it sees.

For childlike loves and laughters thence prolong→
Notes that bid enter, fearless as the breeze,
Even to the shrine of holiest-hearted song,
Songs light as these.[1]

The *rondeau redoublé* has no relation to the rondeau. It consists of six four-lined stanzas, the lines of the first stanza reappearing successively as the last lines of stanzas 2, 3, 4, and 5. The last stanza contains no repeated lines, but is followed by the first few words of the first stanza.

The *villanelle* has nineteen lines on two rhymes, $A_1bA_2abA_1abA_2abA_1abA_2abA_1A_2$, the first line being repeated as the sixth, twelfth, and eighteenth, the third as the ninth, fifteenth, and nineteenth:

O Singer of Persephone!
In the dim meadows desolate
Dost thou remember Sicily?

Still through the ivy flits the bee
Where Amaryllis lies in state;
O Singer of Persephone!

Simaetha calls on Hecate
And hears the wild dogs at the gate:
Dost thou remember Sicily?

Still by the light and laughing sea
Poor Polypheme bemoans his fate;
O Singer of Persephone!

And still in boyish rivalry
Young Daphnis challenges his mate;
Dost thou remember Sicily?

[1] *Dedication to Christina G. Rossetti, Poems*, Vol. V, p. 113.

Slim Lacon keeps a goat for thee,
For thee the jocund shepherds wait;
O Singer of Persephone!
Dost thou remember Sicily?[1]

The *triolet* is the shortest and daintiest of these repeating forms generally written in very short lines and rhymed *ABaAabAB*. As with all the repeating forms it is often used as an exercise in skill of giving a different grammatical turn to the repeated words:

When first we met we did not guess
That Love would prove so hard a master;
Of more than common friendliness
When first we met we did not guess.
Who could foretell this sore distress,
This irretrievable disaster
When first we met?—We did not guess
That Love would prove so hard a master.[2]

The *sestina*, which passed from France to Italy, and was honoured by Dante and Petrarch, consisted originally of six six-lined stanzas of unrhymed verse, with a final stanza of three lines, the same final words being used in each stanza but in a different order. This is the form used by Edmund Gosse in his sestina, 'In fair Provence, the land of lute and rose'. But as used in England the sestina generally has rhyme within the stanzas. Drummond of Hawthornden, who calls his two poems written in this metre 'sixtains', has the rhyme-scheme *ababcc* for the first stanza, but as the rule is that the final word of the last line of each stanza shall take the first place in the next stanza, the order of rhyming has to be disturbed. Swinburne uses only two rhymes, beginning *ababab*. Neither poet follows the complicated laws of the Italian practice for the order in which the end-words shall recur. Swinburne's *Complaint of Lisa* is a *double sestina*, consisting of twelve twelve-lined stanzas arranged in the same way.[3]

[1] Oscar Wilde, *Theocritus. A Villanelle*, *Poems*, p. 158.
[2] Bridges, *Triolet*. *Shorter Poems*, Bk. I, 16. *Poetical Works*, Vol. II, p. 39.
[3] The *lai*, *virelai*, and *virelai nouveau* are omitted, as being of very uncertain structure and history and having hardly any importance in English.

CHAPTER XV

CLASSICAL METRES IN ENGLISH

RHYTHM in Latin and Greek poetry was founded not on stress, but on quantity, on patterns of long and short syllables. There are two ways in which a poet writing in English may consistently attempt the reproduction of classical metres. Either he may take over the quantitative system and compose out of English words feet of long and short syllables, arranged according to the rules of the Greek and Latin poets, or he may substitute for any arrangement of quantitative feet a similar arrangement of stress feet, an English heavy syllable corresponding to a classical long, and an English light to a classical short. To the versifier who chooses the first method, that of writing quantitative verse in English, a further choice of alternatives is presented. In applying the conception of quantity to English words he may consider the sounds of the words as he speaks them, and judge of the length and shortness of all syllables by ear, or he may subject English words as far as possible to the classical laws for determining quantity. The difference between the two methods shows clearly in the scansion of a word which contains a pair of consonants, or two words of which the first ends and the second begins with a consonant. Vowels have their intrinsic value in English as in Latin, and this must be determined by ear. A syllable containing a long vowel will be long, but it is possible to apply to English words the Latin law to the effect that every syllable is long if its vowel, even when short, is separated from the

following vowel by two or more consonants which cannot in that order begin a Latin word, or by a repeated consonant, whether or not the consonants form part of the same word. According to this law 'pity' would be a pyrrhic, but 'ditty' a trochee, whereas both have the same value to the English ear, the doubling of a consonant having quite a different function in English from that which it has in Latin. In the same way 'at night', according to the law, would be a spondee, while 'at right' might be an iambus, with the same value as 'a tribe' because the combination 'tr' is one which can begin a word. The word 'infinitely', according to the law, would form two trochees, but to the English ear all its syllables might well have equal value in length. The possibility of these alternatives, with the difficulties which they involve, does not seem to have been realised by the English writers who first introduced the fashion of *versing*.

Soon after the middle of the sixteenth century, men educated in the classics, and especially in Latin, dissatisfied with the disorder of English prosody, reasoned not unnaturally that by introducing the Latin metrical system they might create in English a type of orderly and regular verse which would give the same kind of pleasure as Latin poetry. The early experimenters evidently intended to write English verse exactly as Latin verse was written,[1] but their extant attempts, which are fairly scanty, and the remains of the prose dissertations with which these were supported, show that none of them had clearly appreciated the difference between quantity and stress, and the consequent confusion led them continually into partial and unsafe analogies. The immense body of prose literature which gathered round the question of versing did not help to clear the ground, and is less instructive to the prosodist than might be expected. A purely English culture, which worshipped spirit in art and was hostile to mechanical

[1] The Greek rules where they differ from the Latin, and the Greek metres which were not adopted by Latin poets, hardly concern the English prosodist at all.

formulae, had developed with the Renaissance. Latin remained the language of scholarship and learned discussion, and there was little effort made to adapt English to such purposes; technical terms were few and ambiguous, syntax indefinite, and when an attempt was made to argue in English, much of the necessary language had therefore to be coined by each writer for himself, so that there was endless possibility of controversy, misunderstanding and cross-purpose, even among men striving for the same kind of perfection.

The main stream of effort in classical versing was directed towards the imitation of the Virgilian hexameter,[1] and the first appearance of this metre in English is in the single couplet, translating the opening lines of the *Odyssey*, which Roger Ascham quotes in *The Scholemaster* as the work of 'one of the best Scholers that euer St. John's Colledge bred, M. Watson, myne old frend, sometime Bishop of Lincoln':

— ⏑ ⏑ — — | — ⏑ ⏑ — | — — | — ⏑ ⏑ — —
All travell|ers do | gladly re|port great | prayse of U|lysses
— ⏑ ⏑ | — ⏑ ⏑ | — — | — — | — ⏑ ⏑ | — —
For that he | knew many | mens man|ers and | saw many | Cities[2]

These lines Ascham praises for 'right quantity of syllables and true order of versing'. But Ascham's excellent friend was not wholly consistent. To count the syllables of 'manners and' all long, one must apply the Latin law, but according to the Latin law the second syllable of 'travellers' would be long, whereas Watson follows his ear and counts it short, and neither a Latin nor an English quantitative system can account for the length given to the first syllable of 'cities', which is made heavy by stress alone. Since this very rough approximation to quantitative verse satisfies Ascham, perhaps we have lost little in the projected and unwritten section of his book, wherein he proposed to deal with the subject of versing 'more at large hereafter'.

[1] — ⏑ ⏑ | — ⏑ ⏑ | — ⏑ ⏑ | — ⏑ ⏑ | — ⏑ ⏑ | — ⏑
[2] *The Scholemaster*, p. 23.

In 1580 the greatest poet and the most conceited poetaster of their age were engaged in an earnest correspondence with frequent reference to classical versing, and both illustrated their precepts by examples, but they worked by different methods. Gabriel Harvey takes the easier way of calling a stressed syllable long, and protests against some of Spenser's quantities :

> Say you suddainly, if you liste ; by my certainly, and certainty I wil not.[1]

Indeed, although he talks of long and short syllables Harvey does not make the distinction between stress and quantity, and he really initiated the practice, which later became the accepted one among English hexametrists, of writing *accentual* hexameters, and he also exemplified the common weakness of the accentual hexameter by allowing a trochee to take the places where a spondee is admitted in Latin. We hear in his verses for the first time the 'tramp in a treadmill', which later became the familiar characteristic of the English version of the metre :

Virtue | sendeth a | man to Re|nowne, Fame | lendeth A|boundance,

Fame with A|boundance | maketh a | man thrise | blessed and | happie

So the Re|warde of | Famous | Vertue | makes many | wealthy,

And the Re|gard of | Wealthie | Vertue | makes many | blessed ;[2]

Though the majority of the feet satisfy the quantitative as well as the stress law, and the feet which are accentual trochees are nearly always quantitative spondees, the lines break the law of the true quantitative hexameter in that a stress falls on the first syllable of each foot, whereas in the Virgilian this is indispensable in the fifth and sixth feet

[1] *Thrie Proper Wittie and Familiar Letters*, Spenser, *Poetical Works*, p. 630.

[2] *Familiar Letters*, *Poetical Works*, p. 624.

only, and should not take place in all the earlier feet; nor does Harvey always observe the *caesura* or break between words within the third or fourth foot. True accentual spondees are the fourth feet in lines 1 and 2.

There is much more poetry in Spenser's elegiacs,[1] which are composed on the quantitative system, though his allocation of quantities will not always bear too close an inspection, being perfectly consistent neither with English pronunciation nor Latin law. Still his verses scan easily enough, with a few allowances, and run pleasantly and musically:

See yee the | blindefould|ed pretie | God, that | feathered | Archer
Of Lou|ers Miser|ies || which maketh | his bloodie | game?
Wote ye why, | his Mooth|er with a | Veale hath | cooured | his face
Trust me, | leaste he my | Looue || happely | chaunce to be|holde.[2]

The strict prosodist will inquire why 'he' and 'ye', 'why' and 'my' are short, while 'me' is long, and why the first syllables of 'feathered' and 'Mother' are long when 'with' is short, and why 'love' and the first syllable of 'covered' are long. But as some of the spellings indicate, changes in pronunciation may account for a great deal here; and it seems to have been the common Elizabethan practice to count open vowels short. A more serious omission on Spenser's part is his neglect of the law governing stress in the last two feet of the line, which mars the effect in lines 2 and 3. But the fact remains that in four centuries of fitful experiment, Spenser's success in this difficult task has hardly been bettered.

His iambic trimeters [3] are not nearly so pleasing, and

[1] Alternate dactyllic hexameter, see p. 296, and dactyllic pentameter:

[2] *Familiar Letters. Poetical Works*, p. 611.

[3]

are very difficult to scan, with the ordinary allowance of substitution. The following scansion does not escape inconsistencies, and has to admit unusual modulations such as a spondee in the even places, which was allowed in the senarius of early drama, but not in the classical trimeter.

Vnhap|pie Verse | the wit|nesse of | m(y) unhap|py state,

Make thy|self flut|tering | wings of | thy fast | flying

Thought, and | fly forth | unto my | love wher|soever | she be :

Whether | lying | restlesse | in heav|y bedde, | or else

Sitting | so cheer|lesse at | the cheer|ful boorde | or else

Playing | alone | careless | on hir heau|enlie Virg|inals.[1]

Two years later appeared Stanyhurst's extraordinary translation into hexameters of several books of the *Aeneid*. As a translation and as poetry it is quite worthless, on account of its curious and comic diction, but it is one of the most amusing products of the versing craze. The metre is intended to be quantitative, but Stanyhurst takes the law into his own hands, assigning length and shortness quite arbitrarily, without the least regard for pronunciation, and justifying himself as far as possible after the event by the quaintest vagaries of spelling :

But look, | on a sud|deyn what | chaunce most | woonderus | hapned

Tweene father | and mooth|er thee | yong boy | setled I|ulus,

A cer|teyn light|ning in his | headtop | glistered | harmelesse.

His crisp | locks frizel|ing, his | temples | prettelye | stroaking.

Heer with al | in tremb|ling with | speede wee | ruffled his | heare bush,

With water | attempt|ing thee | flame too | mortifie | sacred.[2]

[1] *Two Other Letters. Poetical Works*, p. 636.
[2] Virgil, *Aeneid*, Bk. II, *Four Books of Virgils Aeneis*, p. D 3 a.

The letter of the law is fulfilled by the observance of the caesura, and of the rule for stress in the last two feet.

By this date also the *Arcadia* was probably completed, and Sidney included in it several songs in elegiacs, hexameters, and some of the less common metres. To each he prefixes the accepted metrical scheme, though without showing the usual allowances for substitution, and he adheres fairly rigidly to the Latin rules.

The charming 'Echo' verses read well and are carried to considerable length:

– – ⏑ ⏑ – – – – – –
Fayre Rockes, | goodly Riv|ers, sweete | Woodes, when | shall I
⏑ – –
see | peace? peace
– – – ⏑ ⏑ – – – – ⏑ –
Peace? what | barres mee my | tounge, who ys | yt yt | comes mee
⏑ – – – – ⏑ – –
so | nye? I.
– ⏑ – – – ⏑ – – – –
Oh I, do | knowe what | Guest I have | mett, yt ys | Ecch(o).
⏑ ⏑ – ⏑
yt ys | Eccho
– – – – – – ⏑ ⏑ – –
Well mett | Ecch(o), app|roche then | tell mee thy | will too?—
⏑ – –
I | will too.[1]

The principle is quantitative, and the English open vowels in 'mee', 'my', 'do', 'so', now undoubtedly long, are always counted short, though there is some inconsistency, 'Oh' and 'nye' being counted long, but 'so' and 'I' short. The third foot in line 2 is a difficulty, for elision would be expected between 'who' and 'ys', but is evidently not intended. Sidney gives to the letter 'h' the English rather than the Latin value, for it prevents elision in the third foot of line 3, and seems to give length to the open vowel 'oh' in the first foot of the same line. It is obvious also that pronunciation and not spelling is considered in the case of 'yt' ('that') in the fourth foot of line 2, for the initial consonant is needed to make the previous word 'yt' ('it') into a long syllable.

[1] *Countess of Pembrooke's Arcadia, Complete Works*, Vol. IV, p. 152.

Specimens of Sidney's other classical experiments, with the names he gives them, may be given with few comments, the principle of construction being the same in every case.

Elegian verses (*Elegiacs*)

Fortune|, Nature, | Love, longe | hathe cont|ended a|boute mee,

Whiche shoulde moste mise|ry || Cast on A | worme yt I | am;

Fortune | thus can | say, Miser|(y) & mis|fortune ys | al one,

And of | mysfort|une, || Fortune hathe | onely the | gifte.[1]

The only surprising quantity here is that of the third syllable of 'misery' in line 2, which, in accordance with Sidney's usual treatment of open vowels, would be short.

Phaleuciackes (*Hendecasyllabics*) [2]

Reason, | tell me thy | Mynde, yf | here bee | Reason?

In this | straunge vyo|lence to | make re|sistence,

Where sweete | Graces e|rect the | stately | Banner?

Of Ver|tues Regi|ment shy|ning in | harness.[3]

Here 'h' has its Latin value and is not counted as a consonant. The quantity of the first syllable of 'shyning' is surprising to modern ears but is similar to that of 'myne' in the Sapphic lines,

Asclepiadickes. (*Lesser Asclepiad Verses*) [4]

O sweete | woodes, the De|lighte | of Soli|tarynes?

O howe | muche I doo | Like | youre soli|tarynes,

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[1] *Countesse of Pembrooke's Arcadia*, Original Version. *Complete Works*, Vol. IV, p. 75.

[2] – – | – ∪ ∪ | – ∪ | – ∪ | – ∪.

[3] *Arcadia*, Original Version. *Complete Works*, Vol. IV, p. 156.

[4] – – | – ∪ ∪ | – | – ∪ ∪ | – ∪ ∪.

Where Mans | Mynde hathe a | freed | Consider|acyon,
Of good|nes, to re|ceyve | Lovely di|rection,[1]

The scansion of 'solitarynes' suggests a different pronunciation from the modern, and the quantity of 'o' is surprising.

Anacrions kinde of Verses

(A kind of iambic dimeter catalectic ⏑ – ⏑, – ⏑ – –, not used in classical Latin, and not identical with any metre of Anacreon, but similar to the broken ionic dimeter of some of the fragments, ⏑ ⏑ – ⏑ – ⏑ – –.)

My Muse, | what ailes | this Ar|doure ?
To blase | my one|ly Sec|rettes :
Alas | yt ys | no glo|ry,
To singe | my owne | decayed | state
Alas | yt ys | no Com|fort,
To speake | withoute | an aun|swer,[2]

It will be noticed that nearly all the feet here are accentual.

Of more interest than either of the last two examples, which are extremely dull and unpoetical, are Sidney's Sapphics,[3] (or, as he calls them, *Sapphistes*), partly on account of their greater merit, partly because the Sapphic stanza has always been the most attractive of the Latin lyric forms to English poets, and Sydney has had many followers. The Latin Sapphic has a stress on the first syllable of each foot, but this Sidney does not always conform to:

Thus not | ending | endes the due | prayse of | her prayse,
Fleshly | vaile Con|sumes, but a | Sowle hath | his Lyfe,
Whiche ys | helde in | Love, Love yt | ys that | hath joynde
Lyfe to this | oure sowle.[4]

[1] *Arcadia*, Original Version. *Complete Works*, Vol. IV, p. 157.
[2] *Arcadia*, Original Version. *Complete Works*, Vol. IV, p. 155.
[3] – ⏑ | – – | – ⏑ ⏑ | – ⏑ | – ⏑ (three lines) followed by – ⏑ ⏑ | – ⏑ (one line).
[4] *Arcadia*, Original Version. *Complete Works*, Vol. IV, p. 77

If the natural stresses are observed the rhythm of the sapphic is altogether lost in the above stanza.

Outside the *Arcadia* Sidney made one or two attempts at translation from Latin verse, keeping the original metre. He is courageous enough to set his own elegiac quatrain,

> Unto no body my woman saith she had rather a wife be,
> Then to myselfe, not though *Jove* grew a suter of hers,
> These be her words, but a womans words to a love that is eager,
> In wind or waters streame do require to be writ.[1]

underneath the original of Catullus,

> Nulli se dicit mulier mea nubere malle,
> Quam mihi non si se Jupiter ipse petat,
> Dicit sed mulier Cupido quae dicit amanti,
> In vento aut rapida scribere optet aqua;[1]

Nothing could more vividly enforce the truth of his own words, which are, after all, the final judgement on the poems dealt with in this chapter:

> straunge things cost too deere for my poore sprites,[2]

William Webbe, who translated into hexameters two eclogues of Virgil, by way of illustration, in his *Discourse of English Poetrie*, follows Harvey in writing lines which, though quantitative (Webbe's are even more strictly so than Harvey's), have nearly always a stress on the first syllable of each foot, and often on both syllables of a spondee, so that the stress rhythm, which the English ear receives so much more readily than the quantitative, tends to become paramount:

/ – ◡ ◡ / / – ◡ ◡ / / – ◡ ◡
Thus did I | wont com|pare manie | great thinges | with many | little,

– ◡ / / – – – ◡ ◡ – ◡ ◡ / /
But this a|bove all | townes as | loftily | mounteth her | high head,

– ◡ ◡ / / / / – – – ◡ ◡ –
As by the | lowe base | shrubbes tall | Cypresse | shooteth a|bove them.[3]

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[1] *Complete Works*, Vol. II, p. 307.
[2] *Astrophel and Stella*, III, *Complete Works*, Vol. II, p. 244.
[3] *Discourse of English Poetrie*, p. H 2 b.

In the first line of this passage Webbe breaks the coincidence of stress with long syllable in the very foot where the coincidence was demanded in Latin. But many more of his spondees than of Harvey's are accentual as well as quantitative, and his lines are therefore more satisfactory considered as accentual hexameters. In elegiacs Webbe attempted only two couplets, but he wrote a Sapphic version of the fourth eclogue of *The Shepheardes Calender*. In this, as in his hexameters, the quantitative rhythm is almost always emphasised by the stress rhythm, but is frequently disturbed by a strong beat on the last syllable of the line. There is also a noticeable tendency to resort too often to elision between vowels, which is clumsy in English:

> Medled ist red rose with a white together
> Which in either cheeke do depeinct a | trymme cheere,
> Her mai|est(ie) and | eye to be|hold so | comel(y), her
> like who remembreth ?[1]

Of all the Elizabethan attempts which are anything more than fragments, by far the most successful are those of Abraham Fraunce, a protégé of Sidney, to whose sister he dedicated in 1591 *The Countesse of Pembrokes Emanuel*, a poem of considerable length which seldom falls below the level of the following lines:

> Glory to | God most | high, || for | blessed | Babe of a | Mayden.
> Whom neith|er Sat|han could | daunt, || nor | company | hellish,
> Nor rag|ing Phari|sees, || nor | deaths un|speakable | anguish:
> Who by the | crosse, by the | nayles, || by the | speare, by the | thorns,
> by the | whipping
> Passed a|loft to the | skies, || and | there in | joy is a|byding:

[1] *Discourse of English Poetrie*, pp. I 2b and I 3a.

Whoe by the | whipps, by the | thorns, || by the | speare, by the |
nayles, by the | crossing;
Lifted us | up to the | skies, || with his | Angels | stil to be | dwelling [1]

Although Fraunce composes on the quantitative system, and assigns quantity by the Latin law, he contrives not to violate, as his predecessors had done, the habits of English pronunciation. His lines read more naturally, but are inclined to have too many accentual feet; lines like the fourth and sixth above, made, as it were, to pattern, with 'standard' or interchangeable feet, can occur too often. There is often a pause in the line, which falls fitly where the caesura is prescribed in Latin.

The practice of versing, weighed in the balance for half a century, fell not undeservedly or surprisingly into disuse. But at the opening of the next century an attempt was made to reassert the authority of the ancients and establish quantitative verse on somewhat different grounds. The book in which the new principles were set forth was Campion's *Observations in the art of English Poesie*, 1602. While admitting the 'passing pitiful successe' which had rewarded the efforts of the hexametrists, Campion maintained that English verse ought still to be written on a quantitative base and without rhyme, though not in the common metres of Latin verse. He therefore proceeded to lay down as unquestionable laws, and with copious illustrations, certain metrical schemes of his own invention. Campion really understood the meaning of quantity, and he was a fine musician, but he was the first of our prosodists to confuse the principles of metre and music, and his laws, based on that confusion, are valid only for the verses which he composed to illustrate them. Many of his lines however, such as the 'pure' and 'licentiate iambic', and several of the trochaic forms, are scannable on ordinary English stress principles, the pure iambic being regular blank-verse lines,

[1] *Countesse of Pembroke's Emanuel*, p. B 1 a.

the licentiate, blank-verse lines with the common modulations:

Harke how | these winds | do mur|mur at | thy flight.[1]

Of the forms which are peculiar to Campion are his 'English Elegeick' which consists of alternate licentiate iambic lines and trochaic lines with a strong middle pause, – – | – ∪ | – || – ∪ | – ∪ | ∪ ⏑:

Constant to none, but euer false to me,
Traiter still to loue || through thy faint desires,
No hope of pittie now nor vaine redresse
Turns my griefs to teares, || and renu'd laments,[2]

his English Sapphics, built on a trochaic pattern as follows,

– – | – ∪ | – ∪ – ∪ | – –
– – | – ∪ | – ∪ | – – | ∪ –
– – | – ∪ | – – | ∪ – | ∪ ∪
At thy | sight tri|umphing.[3]

and one or two trochaic stanzas which Campion calls odes, of which the most famous is 'Rose cheeked Lawra'. But why the English Sapphic and the English elegiac should be composed by these rules, since no one beside Campion has ever written one, we are not informed. Campion was not faithful to his own precepts, as the *Bookes of Ayres* bear witness. He soon relapsed into charming rhymed accentual stanza forms, and it is not surprising that after such apostacy he found no disciples.

After Campion's unwelcome proposal, for more than a century there is no record of the writing of quantitative verse, or verse in the classical metres. Then in 1706 comes a single poem 'attempted in English Sapphick', Isaac Watts's *Day of Judgement*, and after it more than half a century again of which this chapter has nothing to report. But in spite of their isolated position, Watts's

[1] *Observations in the Art of English Poesie*, p. 10.
[2] *Observations in the Art of English Poesie*, pp. 25–6.
[3] *Observations in the Art of English Poesie*, p. 30.

Sapphics may be truly considered as ushering in the second phase in the history of classical metres in English, for the principle of his verses is not quantitative, but is frankly that foreshadowed by Gabriel Harvey, the substitution of stress feet for the quantitative feet in a Latin metrical system. Watts's verses are not perfect in the new technique, but the intention is obvious, and the effect, though losing almost all the subtlety of the Latin stanza, is occasionally so powerful that it is surprising that neither Watts himself nor any of those who read his poem was encouraged to try the metre again. The poem begins with a perfect line on the new principle:

When the | Fierce North|-wind with his | Airy | Forces [1]

But the difficulty of bringing three heavy syllables together in the second and third feet soon becomes apparent, and the third is apt to be weakened. A loss of weight in a single syllable, which is a very welcome modulation in a line composed of identical feet, is fatal in a composite form like those of the Latin stanzas, especially when the lapse occurs repeatedly in the same place:

Tears the | strong Pill|ars of the | Vault of | Heaven,
Breaks up | old Marb|le the Re|pose of | Princes;
See the | Graves op|en, and the | Bones a|rising.[2]

Apart from the disruption of the Sapphic rhythm, the bringing together of three light syllables weakens the line. Towards the end of the poem Watts's power over the instrument weakens still further, and some of the verses are 'horrid confusion heaped upon confusion':

Hopeless Immortals! how they scream and shiver
While Devils push them to the Pit wide Yawning
Hideous and gloomy, to receive them headlong
Down to the Centre [3]

[1] *Horae Lyricae*, p. 40. [2] *Horae Lyricae*, p. 41.
[3] *Horae Lyricae*, p. 42.

Strangely enough, the ugly rhythm of the first line of the above stanza, or something very like it, became for a time the accepted version of the Sapphic rhythm, and in it, with slight variations, are written Cowper's dreadful Sapphics of 1763:

/ × × / × \ × / × / ×
Hatred and vengeance, my eternal portion,
/ × × / × / × \ × / ×
Scarce can endure delay of execution,
/ × × / × / × × × / ×
Wait with impatient readiness to seize my
/ × × / ×
Soul in a moment.[1]

The contrast between the jolting, jigging rhythm and the mad despair of the sentiment makes the effect of these verses intolerably painful. No wonder that Cowper prefaced his translation of Horace's 'Persicos odi, puer, apparatus' with the remark that 'English Sapphics have been attempted, but with little success'. The verses of the translation are much pleasanter than the Sapphic of Cowper's delirium, but are even further from the true Sapphic rhythm.

The spurious Sapphic rhythm (/×× | // | /××× | /×) is still further corrupted in Southey's unfortunate poem, *The Widow*, and in the excellent parodies which it called forth. The bad poetry and lame metre of Southey's poem were parodied, and the humanitarian principles of his friends were ridiculed, by Canning, Gifford, and Frere, in *The Anti-Jacobin*. *The Friend of Humanity and the Knife-Grinder* is now much better known than its unhappy prototype. A stanza from each will show how the parodists followed Southey in the sham Sapphic scheme:

/ / / / \ / \
Cold was the night wind, drifting fast the snow fell,
/ / / /
Wide were the downs and shelterless and naked,
/ / / /
When a poor wanderer struggled on her journey,
Weary and waysore.[2]

[1] *Lines written under the Influence of Delirium, Poems*, p. 29.
[2] *The Widow, Poetical Works*, Vol. II, p. 141.

Needy Knife-grinder! whither are you going?
Rough is the road, your wheel is out of order—
Bleak blows the blast;—your hat has got a hole in't,
So have your breeches![1]

The note of the parody was taken up in a further set of mock Sapphics which appeared some days later in *The Morning Chronicle*, entitled *The Collector and the Householder*:

Buggy, no longer do I drive a smart one:
Smash went my gig, as long ago as Easter;
Down Highgate Hill we tumbled altogether,—
Horse, wife and I, sir.[2]

This provoked a final and more open outburst in *The Anti-Jacobin*, and a parody of *The Soldier's Wife*, which Southey had written in a metre which he calls *dactyllics*, in four-foot lines grouped in threes with many heavier feet substituted for the dactyl:

Weary way-wanderer, languid and sick at heart,
Travelling painfully over the rugged road,
Wild-visaged Wanderer! God help thee wretched one.[3]

Whether Southey intended this to represent any classical metre, we are not told, but he places the poem next to his Sapphics in the collected edition of his works. The parody emphasises the impossibility of preserving the rhythmic effect without doing violence to the sense- and speech-values of the words.

Wearisome | Sonnetteer, | feeble and | querulous
Painfully | dragging out | thy demo-|cratic lays—
Moon-stricken | Sonnetteer, | 'ah! for thy | heavy chance!'[4]

It must have been about this time that Ferdinand Fleming, who died in 1813, wrote the musical setting of

[1] *Poetry of the Anti-Jacobin*, p. 8.
[2] *The Collector and the Householder, Morning Chronicle*, Dec. 12, 1797.
[3] *The Soldier's Wife, Poetical Works*, Vol. II, p. 140.
[4] *Poetry of the Anti-Jacobin*, p. 17.

Horace's 'Integer vitae' which has probably been chiefly responsible for perpetuating a wrong conception of the Sapphic rhythm.

It may have been the same ugly and unfortunate rhythm which was in Lamb's mind when he wrote that metrically baffling poem, *The Old Familiar Faces.*[1]

Coleridge's rambling, half-humorous verse letter to William and Dorothy Wordsworth and his *Hymn to the Earth* are the first hexameter poems to be based frankly on stress. A first reading of these two poems shows clearly the inherent weakness of the metre, and the difficulties which few subsequent writers have succeeded in overcoming. Stress-spondees are too hard to come by; no unforced poetic diction seems to contain them in anything like the proportion in which quantitative spondees were found in Latin. The result is that accentual hexameters either contain few disyllabic feet, becoming almost wholly dactyllic, and so much more rapid and less varied in movement than the stately Latin lines, or they admit trochees freely in the place of spondees, and thus lose weight and substance:

Earth! thou | mother of | numberless | children, the | nurse and the | mother,

Sister | thou of the | stars, and be|loved by the | Sun, the re|joicer!

Fadeless and | young (and | what if the | latest | birth of cre|ation?)

Bride and | consort of | Heaven, that | looks down up|on thee en-| amour'd![2]

The English hexameter suffers also from inability to modulate. The modulation which is given in Latin by the varying play of stress rhythm over the fixed quantitative system, is not to be had where stress itself becomes the constant element. Against an emphatic and unmodulated base, even pause variation and overflow seem hard to

[1] For another suggestion, see p. 282.

[2] *Hymn to the Earth, Poetical Works*, p. 139.

achieve. It is rare to find over-running in hexameter verse. The rhythmic resources of the metre are thus limited to the interchange of dactyl and spondee or trochee, a poverty hardly rivalled even by the heroic couplet in its narrowest form.

In *Mahomet* Coleridge attempts foot modulation, with the most disastrous results:

/ / × / × / × × / × / / × / ×
Huge wasteful | empires | founded and | hallow'd | slow perse|cution,
/ / × × × / × / × × / × ×
Soul-wither|ing, but | crush'd the | blasphemous | rites of the |
/ ×
Pagan
× × / × × / × ×
And i|dolatrous | Christians.[1]

His *Catullan Hendecasyllabics* are incomprehensible, and bear only the faintest resemblance to the metre which they are supposed to represent. Each line has twelve syllables instead of eleven, and begins with two trisyllabic feet, generally dactyls. The remaining feet, as in the Latin line, are three trochees.

× × × / × × / × × × / ×
And with in|visible | pilot|age to | guide it
/ × × / / × / × / × / ×
Over the | dusk wave, un|til the | nightly | sailor
/ × × × / × × / × / ×
Shivering with | ecstasy | sank up|on her | bosom.[2]

The ridicule poured on Southey's early stanzaic efforts did not prevent him from writing *The Vision of Judgement* in the worst possible hexameters. The introduction and appendix to the poem testify to Southey's knowledge of the efforts of the Elizabethans, and to a praiseworthy interest in the theory of the metre which he is attempting. But Southey shows that he has a very imperfect ear when he declares that the hexameter is constructed of dactyls and *trochees*, and thus absolves himself from the obligation of finding English spondees, whose existence, indeed, he denies. He also consciously admits trochees in the fifth place 'for the sake of variety or of some particular effect'[3],

[1] *Mahomet, Poetical Works*, p. 139.
[2] *Catullan Hendecasyllabics, Poetical Works*, p. 140.
[3] *Preface to a Vision of Judgement, Poetical Works*, Vol. X, p. 196.

though rarely. The prosody of the work is difficult to judge apart from its absurd poetry, but the following lines show the inadequacy of the trochees, and the deficiency in true hexameter effect of the lines which have a trochee in the fifth place:

Ho! he ex|claim'd, King | George of | England | standeth in | judgement!

Hell hath been | dumb in his | presence. | Ye who on | earth ar|raign'd him,

Come ye be|fore him | now, and | here ac|cuse or ab|solve him.[1]

Southey also allows himself the licence of beginning a line with any disyllabic or trisyllabic foot, and lines with iambic openings are not uncommon:

At whose | well unde|filed I | drank in my | youth, and was | strengthen'd,[2]

Tennyson's *Boadicea*, the longest of his classical experiments, is supposedly in *galliambics*, but no correspondence can be found, even in general effect, between the rhythm of this poem and the extant examples of this difficult Latin metre.[3] Tennyson's attempts to compose the galliambic would seem to have been frustrated by the intrusion on his ear of another much easier and more decided metre, the popular *trochaic tetrameter catalectic* of the *Pervigilium Veneris*, a line of alternating trochees and spondees, with occasional resolutions, whose accepted stress equivalent is the metre of his own *Locksley Hall*. The lines of *Boadicea* can all be divided into eight falling feet, although dactyls are allowed anywhere, and not only in the second, fourth and sixth places, where they would be accepted in the *Pervigilium* metre, as resolved spondees. The earlier feet have the definite marching habit of the *Locksley Hall* line, but the similarity fades at the end of the lines which are often crowded with weak syllables, in an evident attempt to

[1] *A Vision of Judgement*, VI, *Poetical Works*, Vol. X, p. 227.
[2] *A Vision of Judgement*, IX, *Poetical Works*, Vol. X, p. 234.
[3] Discussed on p. 323.

reproduce the group of short syllables with which the galliambic line usually ends:

Bloodily|, bloodily | fall the | battleaxes, | unex|hausted, in|exor-
ab|le.[1]

Thine the | liberty, | thine the | glory, | thine the | deeds to be |
cele|brated[2]

Shall we | deal with it | as an | infant? | shall we | dandle it |
amorous|ly[3]

With this confused and turgid character, *Boadicea* cannot be called a prosodic success. Tennyson's other careful and correct experiments are in quantity, with length assigned according to the Latin rules, so that the last syllable of 'experiment', for instance, is long, in the famous elegiac verses *On Translations of Homer*.

Barbarous | experi|ment, || barbarous | hexame|ters[3]

Both this and his hendecasyllabics are in the nature of humorous or derisive tours de force. But there is a genuine and noble music in his *Alcaics*[4] on Milton, where stress rhythm enforces the quantitative:

Whose | Titan | angels, | Gabriel, | Abdiel,
Starr'd | from Je|hovah's | gorgeous | armouries
Tower | as the | deep domed | empy|rean
Rings to the | roar of an | angel | onset.[5]

Such cameo-cutting, however, counts for little beside the determined effort which was initiated by Longfellow in

[1] *Boadicea, Poetical Works*, p. 242.
[2] *Boadicea, Poetical Works*, p. 241.
[3] *On Translations of Homer, Poetical Works*, p. 243.
[4] ⏑ – ⏑ | – – | – ⏑ ⏑ | – ⏑ ⏑
⏑ – ⏑ | – – | – ⏑ ⏑ | – ⏑ ⏑
– | – ⏑ | – – | – ⏑ | – ⏑
– ⏑ ⏑ | – ⏑ ⏑ | – ⏑ | – ⏑
[5] *Alcaics, Poetical Works*, p. 243.

America, and furthered in England by Clough and Kingsley, to make the English hexameter the vehicle for a long poem.

Longfellow's two poems and his translations constitute the largest body of hexameter work in English and justify themselves on the whole as poetry, though there are prosaic intrusions like that of the 'hasty and somewhat irascible blacksmith' which we cannot feel to be uninvited by the metre. Longfellow's lines are mainly dactyllic, and he is safest in description, wherever a slightly dreamlike and monotonous effect is suitable to the matter:

Lovely the | moonlight | was || as it | glanced and | gleamed on the | water,
Gleamed on the | columns of | cypress and | cedar sus|taining the arches,

Down through whose | broken | vaults || it | fell as through | chinks in a | ruin.

Dreamlike, and | indis|tinct, || and | strange were | all things a|round them:

And o'er their | spirits there | came a | feeling of | wonder and | sadness,—

Strange fore|bodings of | ill, || un|seen and that | cannot be | compassed.[1]

Occasionally he achieves a really moving simplicity of narrative:

Then he a|rose from his | seat, || and | looked forth | into the | darkness,

Felt the | cool air | blow on his | cheek that was | hot with the | insult,
Lifted his | eyes to the | heavens, || and, | folding his | hands as in | childhood,
Prayed in the | silence of | night to the | Father who | seeth in | secret.[2]

But simplicity of this kind trembles constantly on the verge of the puerile. Two features of Longfellow's technique appear from the above passages; he so accustoms us to

[1] *Evangeline*, Part II, ii, *Poetical Works*, p. 86.
[2] *The Courtship of Miles Standish*, IV, *Poetical Works*, p. 173

the gentle roll of his dactyls that we are unprepared for the trochees which occur, and are ready to suppress a heavy syllable rather than accept them. In a first reading of line 2 in the second passage we should almost certainly scan :

Felt the cool | air blow

before being thrown out of our stride by inability to fit the remaining syllables to the base. The second noticeable trait is a strong tendency to a pause in the middle of the third foot, or less often of the fourth, where the Latin caesura occurred.

Evangeline had only been known a year before Clough's *Bothie of Tober-na-Vuolich* made its appearance. Clough's hexameters are somewhat helter-skelter in pace and thin in substance, owing to the overbalance of trochees, which sometimes constitute whole lines, and are admitted even in the fifth place :

Great was sur|mise in | College at | breakfast, | wine, and | supper,
Keen the con|jecture and | joke ; but | Adam | kept the | secret,
Adam the | secret | kept, and | Philip | read like | fury.[1]

The spirit of the *Bothie* is not uniformly poetical, and the metre falls in quite harmoniously with the slang.

Take off your | coat to it, | Philip, cried | Lindsay, out|side in the | garden [2]

That's right,

and the bland pedestrianism of the main parts of the narrative :

Laughter en|sued a|gain ; and the | Tutor, re|covering | slowly,
Said, Are not | these per|haps as | doubtful as | other at|tractions ?
There is a | truth in your | view, but | I think ex|tremely dis|torted ;
Still there is a | truth, I | own, I | under|stand you en|tirely,[3]

[1] *The Bothie, Poems and Prose Remains*, Vol. II, p. 279.
[2] *The Bothie, Poems and Prose Remains*, Vol. II, p. 213.
[3] *The Bothie, Poems and Prose Remains*, Vol. II, p. 217.

We should resent this kind of thing if it were offered to us in blank verse. The associations of the hexameter, combined with the easy-going character which Clough gives to it, make it a fitting vehicle for the holiday-academic background of the theme, and its impression of jaunty bravado suits the flippant, slightly bitter mingling of satire and sentiment. But when Clough tries it for serious and tender passages it speaks its own inadequacy:

Daily appreciating more, and more exactly appraising—
With these | thoughts, and the terror withal of a | thing she | could not |→
Estimate, and of a step (such a step!) in the dark to be taken,
Terror | nameless and ill-understood of deserting her station,—
Daily | heavier, heavier upon her pressed her sorrow,
Daily distincter, distincter within her arose the conviction,
He was too high, too perfect, and she so unfit, so unworthy.[1]

The weak and wordy phrases, the futile repetitions, make dreary and disgusting reading. Such a situation demands the dignified movement of prose, or the pregnant rhythm of poetry.

Clough was encouraged, however, to try the metre again, in his even more pedestrian and gossipping treatment of social psychology, *Amours de Voyage*, for which one is tempted to borrow the words used by one of its own characters in criticism of Rome:

Rubbishy seems the word that most exactly would suit it[2]

Kingsley's poem appeared in the same year as Longfellow's second venture, *The Courtship of Miles Standish*, and is a very distinct improvement on the work of his predecessors. He made better use of the hexameter than any other poet either before or after, as a serious, sustained and majestic metre, and never seems to lose sight of his poetic purpose in the difficulties of prosody. Overflow,

[1] *The Bothie, Poems and Prose Remains*, Vol. II, p. 271.
[2] *Amours de Voyage*, Canto I, *Poems and Prose Remains*, Vol. II, p. 301.

compassed with easy mastery, gives variety to the expressive movement of his descriptive passages:

Roaring in cranny and crag, || till the pillars and clefts of the basalt→

Rang like a | god-swept | lyre, and her | brain grew | mad with the noises;
Crashing and lapping of waters, || and sighing and tossing of weed-beds,
Gurgle and whisper and hiss of the foam, || while thundering surges→

Boomed in the | wave worn | halls, as they champed at the roots of the mountains.

. . . . . .

High in the | far off | glens rose | thin blue | curls from the homesteads;
Softly the low of the herds, and the pipe of the outgoing herdsman,
Slid to her ear on the water, and melted her heart into weeping.[1]

In many of the dramatic utterances the rhythm is skilfully broken by pauses within the feet, and there is a piercing quality in the poetry, and a wild half-barbaric onset throughout that is entirely fitting to the theme:

Are there no | deaths save | this, || great | Sun. || No | fiery | arrow
Lightning, || or | deep mouthed | wave? || Why | thus? || What | music in | shrieking,
Pleasure in | warm live | limbs torn | slowly? || And | dar'st thou be|hold them!
Oh, thou hast | watched worse | deeds! || All | sights are a|like to thy | brightness![2]

Kingsley is very seldom satisfied with a trochee, and often manages to bring together several true spondees, for an impressive or quiet effect, without putting any apparent constraint on his diction. *Andromeda* is perhaps the only hexameter poem which is not a weariness to the reader.

Both Kingsley and Clough wrote elegiacs. Kingsley's

[1] *Andromeda, Poems*, pp. 210–11.
[2] *Andromeda, Poems*, p. 211.

are powerful and expressive, and truly elegiac and mournful in tone, and he manages to vary the pauses even in the pentameter line:

Sing not, thou sky-lark a|bove! || even | angels pass hushed by the weeper,
Scream on, || ye | sea-fowl! || my | heart | echoes your | desolate | cry.
Sweep the dry | sand on, || thou | wild wind, || to | drift o'er the | shell and the | sea-weed;
Seaweed and | shell, || like my | dreams, || swept down the | pitiless | tide.[1]

Here he inclines to substitute still heavier feet for the dactyl, not always with happy effect.

Clough's elegiacs, which introduce the sections or cantos of *Amours de Voyage*, are more graceful and less unpleasing than his hexameters. He has also a small group of essays in classical metres based on quantity, hexameters, elegiacs and a few stanzas in Alcaics. Some of the quantities are quite unjustifiable however:

But I, | with my | ships in a | body, the | whole that o|beyed me,
Fled, well perceiving that wrath was rising against us;
Tydides also fled with me, his company calling;
Later, up|on our | track foll|owed the yel|low Menelaus;[2]

There seems to be no excuse for the length of 'but' and the first syllable of 'body' in the first line or of the second syllable of 'upon' in the last, and if 'followed' begins with a long syllable, so should 'yellow'.

The Alcaics are more pleasant, but are easily outstripped in excellence by a few lines in the same metre contained in *Amours de Voyage*, a fragment of translation, faithful to the Alcaic stanza, from Horace's fourth ode in Book III,

[1] *Elegiacs, Poems*, p. 239.
[2] *Letters of Parepidemus. Poems and Prose Remains*, Vol. I, p. 400.

and a deft and delicate piece of work, except for the third foot in the third line of the second stanza:

Eager for | battle here
Stood | Vulcan, | here mat|ronal | Juno,
And with the | bow to his | shoulder | faithful

He | who with | pure dew | laveth of | Castaly
His | flowing | locks, who | holdeth of | Lycia
Th(e) oak | forest | and the | wood that | bore him,
Delos' and | Patara's | own Ap|ollo.[1]

Very similar in sound to Clough's hexameters are those of Ebenezer Elliot, whose best are in humorous condemnation of the practice which they illustrate:

Though my | verbiage | pleased me, || long a|go did it | journey
Whither | dead things | tend. For | Homer's | world-famous | metre
Cannot in | English be | pleasing. || Saxon may | write it in | Saxon,
Oft for | dactyl and | spondee | using i|ambic and | trochee,
Pleased—and | making a | boast of his | wasted | labour and | lost time[2]
Slow or | rapid, | sweet or | solemn, in | Greek and in | Latin,
It is in | English un|dignified, | loose, and | worse than the | worst prose.[3]

If anyone could disprove these words it would be Swinburne, who wielded a magician's rod over all metres, and in his classical experiments, as in other difficult or unusual metres, produced exquisitely musical and unhampered verse. But he never attempted a long poem, or used the hexameter.

[1] *Amours de Voyage*, Canto I. *Poems and Prose Remains*, Vol. II, p. 307.
[2] *To Thomas Lister, Poetical Works*, Vol. II, p. 206.
[3] *To Thomas Lister, Poetical Works*, Vol. II, p. 207.

He followed the accentual principle and made his own licences. His *Evening on the Broads*, for example, begins in almost faultless elegiacs:

/ × / /
Over two | shadowless | waters, a|drift as a | pinnace in | peril,
Hangs in a | heavy sus|pense, || charged with ir|resolute | light,
Softly the | soul of the | sunset up|holden a|while on the | sterile
Waves and | wastes of the | land, || half repos|sessed by the | night.[1]

but he soon falls into a habit of anacrusis, of prefixing one or two light syllables to the first foot:

× × / / / × × / / / × / ×
As a | bird un|fledged is the | broad-winged | night, whose | winglets
× / ×
are | callow [2]

This disturbs the metre surprisingly little; more disruptive in effect is the completion of the half-foot of the pentameter line:

/ × / × / /
Northward, | lonely for | miles, ere | ever a | village be|gan [3]

/ × × / / /
More for the | sound than the | silence a|thirst for the | sound that |
/
slakes [4]

But neither of these liberties, though they destroy the exact correspondence with the Latin metre, detracts from the charm of a beautiful poem, or from the suitability of the measure to the mood of melancholy repose. Similarly, in his Sapphics, Swinburne does not make a point of having a spondee for the second foot, but is satisfied with a trochee, and he allows a spondee to take the place of a trochee elsewhere in the line:

/ × / / / × × / × / ×
Saw the | white im|placable | Aphro|dite,
/ × / / / × × / / / ×
Saw the | hair un|bound and the | feet un|sandalled
/ × / × / × × / × / ×
Shine as | fire of | sunset on | western | waters;
/ × × / ×
Saw the re|luctant→

[1] *Evening on the Broads*, *Poems*, Vol. V, p. 59.
[2] *Evening on the Broads*, *Poems*, Vol. V, p. 59.
[3] *Evening on the Broads*, *Poems*, Vol. V, p. 65.
[4] *Evening on the Broads*, *Poems*, Vol. V, p. 67.

Feet, the | straining | plumes of the | doves that | drew her,
Looking | always, | looking with | necks re|verted,
Back to | Lesbos, | back to the | hills where|under
Shone Mity|lene ; [1]

His hendecasyllabics have the inevitable monotony of that measure, and here again Swinburne habitually substitutes a trochee for the spondee of the opening foot :

In the | month of the | long de|cline of | roses
I, be|holding the | summer | dead be|fore me [2]

But he made a new and very successful venture in introducing the *choriambic* rhythm into English :

Love, || what | ailed thee to leave | life || that was made | lovely, ||
we thought, | with love ?
What sweet | visions of sleep | lured thee away, | down from the
light | above ?
What strange | faces of dreams, | voices that called, | hands that
were raised | to wave
Lured or | led thee, || alas, | out of the sun, | down to a sun|less
grave ? [3]

The line seems most effective when it has a full spondee for the introductory foot, though a trochee occasionally satisfies Swinburne ; the final foot is always an iambus. Swinburne shows his skill in varying the pauses, which tend naturally to fall with too great regularity at the ends of the feet. But the base, with its monotony and its strange rocking motion, well expresses the dreariness of utter woe and desolation, and is one of the most acceptable of all the classical bases in English.

Swinburne also attempted the reproduction of a Greek

[1] *Sapphics, Poems*, Vol. I, p. 204.
[2] *Hendecasyllabics, Poems*, Vol. I, p. 202.
[3] *Choriambics, Poems*, Vol. III, p. 98.

metre in translating *The Grand Chorus of Birds from Aristophanes* into an English equivalent of its original anapaestic heptameter. He cannot attempt to introduce as many spondees in modulation as occur in the original; they are seldom found in his poem except at the beginning of lines, in which place also he often admits a monosyllable, so that the metre becomes indistinguishable, except for its light endings, from the English anapaestic forms, of which Swinburne makes such frequent use. Nevertheless his poem certainly represents very fairly the effect of the Greek chorus as it appeals to English ears:

Gold | wings glit|tering forth | of his back, | like whirl|winds gust|-
ily turning.
He, af|ter his wed|lock with Cha|os, whose wings | are of dark|ness
in hell | broad-burning,
For his nest|lings begat | him the race | of us first, | and upraised |
us a light | new-lighted.
And before | this was | not the race | of the gods, | until all | things
by Love | were united; [1]

Translations of the Greek and Latin epics into English hexameters, either completely or in fragments, were fairly numerous during the nineteenth century. The most genuinely poetic are Meredith's fragments from the *Iliad*, which achieve real spondees instead of the makeshift trochees, and are unusually free from humdrum equality in the composition of the feet:

Like as a | terrible | fire feeds | fast on a | forest e|normous,
Upon a | mountain | height, and the | blaze of it | radiates | round
far,
So on the | bright blest | arms of the | host in their | march did the |
splendour
Gleam wide | round through the | circle of | air right | up to the |
sky-vault.[2]

[1] *Grand Chorus of Birds, Poems*, Vol. V, p. 44.
[2] *Iliad II.* 455, *Poetical Works*, p. 555.

Meredith's most original experiment, however, is *Phaethon* 'attempted in the Galliambic measure'. The traditional account of the Galliambic bases it on the ionic a minore foot ⏑ ⏑ – –. This is repeated four times, the fourth time curtailed. But in the extant examples, of which Catullus's *Attis* (*Carmina* 63) is the only complete poem, the ionic feet are allowed not only to be resolved or contracted but to cross over each other, interchanging their parts, so to speak, so that all impression of a repeated foot is lost, and the accepted scheme becomes ⏑̄ ⏑̄ – ⏑ – ⏑ – – | ⏑̄ ⏑̄ – ⏑ ⏑̄ ⏑̄ ⏑ ⏑̄ with still further resolutions and licences. The standard line above is fairly closely represented in Meredith's poem, except that in substituting stress for quantity, he finds it impossible to bring together such a bunch of light syllables as Catullus normally produces at the end of his lines, and one of the last five is almost bound to be stressed. Also Meredith's lines often begin with a double trochee instead of a dactyl or third paeon, and the last syllable in the first half of the line is often unstressed:

× × / × / × / × × × / × × / ××× /
At the coming up of Phoebus || the all-luminous charioteer,
/ × / × / × / × × × / ×× / × ×
Double-visaged stand the mountains || in imperial multitudes,
× × / × / × / / × × / × × / × × ×
And with shadows dappled men sing || to him, Hail, o Beneficent![1]

But it is very difficult to appreciate so unfamiliar and recondite a rhythm.

A new stage in the history of classical versing opens with the work of the present Laureate and his friend the late William Johnston Stone. They made an effort to give new life to the hexameter by seriously attacking the problem of quantity in English, a proceeding long overdue. Their findings are summarised by Bridges in his note to *An Epistle to a Socialist in London* and provide theoretically a complete and satisfactory apparatus for the writing of quantitative verse in English. The sounds of words are

[1] *Phaéthôn*, *Poetical Works*, p. 312.

considered apart from the vagaries and inconsistencies of English spelling, and rules are deduced which provide for the sounds and phenomena which had no existence in the classical languages, such as the English consonants 'sh' and 'th' and their effects on preceding vowels. The different value of 'h' in English from that which it has in Latin is taken into account, and also the fact that a double consonant seldom represents a double or prolonged sound. In certain cases stress is allowed to affect quantity, in so much as its position in regard to 'word-accent' often determines whether a given syllable will have a long or short vowel sound, ('Pious'; 'impious'; 'previous'; 'preeminent'). The single inconsistency in the scheme is that it allows certain important monosyllabic words, on account of the weight almost inevitably given to them by emphasis, to be counted long though their vowels are short ('man', 'love', 'God').

The only performances by which these apparently sound rules may be judged are the poems of Bridges himself. His translations from part of the sixth book of the *Aeneid*, called, perhaps not without reference to the conditions of its metrical art, *Ibant Obscuri*, and two original pieces, *Wintry Delights* and the *Epistle to a Socialist in London*, are all written in the hexameter, founded on English quantity. Their effect is undoubtedly disappointing, even when the reader has accustomed himself to certain peculiarities of spelling and notation, designed to facilitate scansion. In *Ibant Obscuri* the difficulties of translation are added to the difficulties of an unfamiliar prosody, and the syntax becomes extremely laboured and involved. But the original poems are not much better. Though more straightforward, they are still lifeless and formless, a mere dragging succession of correctly weighted feet, without resilience or any major rhythmic form. The lines become musical only in proportion to the number of accentual feet which they contain, and Bridges disregards the Latin custom of making

the two final feet always accentual as well as quantitative:

Yea, set aside with these all Nature's beauty, the wildwood's
Flow'ry do|main, the flush|ing, soft | crowding | loveliness | of Spring,
Lazy Summer's burning dial, the se|renely sol|emn spells
Of Sibylline Autumn, with gay-wing'd Plenty departing;[1]

All the expense of the poet's most exquisite diction seems to be wasted, and the quantities of such feet as those in line 2, where the syllables 'ing' and 'of' have to be counted long on account of the consonants belonging to the next word, are difficult of acceptance by an English ear, when the listener is trying to concentrate on the sounds of his own language, and not to adapt himself to the conventions of a classical law.

Bridges has written, besides short pieces in elegiacs, choriambics, and some of the stanzaic forms, but a comparison of his version in Alcaics of Blake's *Evening* with the original, shows how native lyric sheds nearly all its magic in the metamorphosis. What Bridges, with his classical learning, his delicate ear, and his instinct for the atmosphere of words, cannot achieve, it is unlikely that another will succeed in.

It seems likely therefore that any success that is to be sought in this long persistent tradition will come by the accentual hexameter, as it has come in very hopeful measure to one of the most recent experimenters, H. B. Cotterill, in his line-for-line translation of the *Odyssey*. His principles, as declared in his preface, are that stressed syllables should be as far as possible long and emphatic and unstressed syllables short and light. He seeks for true English spondees as far as possible, but finds accentual trochees sometimes admissible so long as they are quantitative spondees, which in effect is a fairly satisfactory compromise. His success, however, seems in a very large

[1] *Now in Wintry Delights*, p. 2.

measure to be due to his effective accomplishment of overflow:

Thus did she | speak, and de|parting the | grey-eyed | goddess
A|thene→
Won to O|lympus; for | here it is | said the a|bode ever|lasting→
Stands of the | gods, which | winds ne'er | shake nor | ever a | rain-
storm→
Wetteth, and | never a | snowflake | falleth, but | cloudless the |
aether→
Spreadeth a|bove, and | over it | floateth a radiant | whiteness.[1]

Better than this has not been done, for wearing quality in a long poem.

[1] *Odyssey*, p. 76.

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INDEX

ababcc, 168–9.
Abercrombie, Lascelles, *The Staircase*, 146.
Addison, Joseph, *Cato*, 122.
Milton's Stile Imitated, 106.
Rosamund, 240.
Akenside, Mark, *Pleasures of Imagination, The*, 110.
Alcaics, 313, 318–9.
Alexandrine, 167.
sonnets in, 196.
stanza-forms from, 169–70.
Alisoun, 149.
Anacrions Kinde of Verses, 302.
Anapaestic Heptameters (Greek), 321–2.
Anti-Jacobin, Poetry of the, 261, 308–9.
Armstrong, John, *Art of Preserving Health, The*, 109.
Arnold, Matthew, *Heine's Grave*, 268.
Merope, 143.
Morality, 169.
Mycerinus, 168.
Philomela, 227–8.
Resignation, 42.
Rugby Chapel, 268.
Scholar Gipsy, The, 223.
Sohrab and Rustum, 142–3.
Thyrsis, 223.
Tristram and Iseult, 43, 58, 249–50.
Ascham, Roger, *The Schoolmaster*, 396.
Asclepiads, 301.

Ballad stanza and variants, 171–5.
Ballade, 286–9.
double, 289.
Barclay, Alexander, *The Ship of Fools*, 153.
Barnes, Barnabe, *Parthenophil and Parthenope*, 195–6.
Beattie, James, *Minstrel, The*, 162.
Odes, 221.
Beaumont, Francis, *Philaster*, 82.
Beddoes, Thomas Lovell, *Dream Pedlary*, 273.
Behn, Mrs. Aphra, *Abdelazar*, 115–6.
Blair, Robert, *Grave, The*, 108.
Blake, William, 36–7.
Evening, 325.
Songs of Experience, 243–4.
Songs of Innocence, 242–3, 244, 268.
Blank verse, 13.
Bottomley, Gordon, *King Lear's Wife*, 147.
Riding to Lithend, The, 147.
Bowles, William Lisle, *On Revisiting Oxford*, 205.
'There is strange music', 205.
Breton, Nicholas, 'Say that I would say', 231.
Bridges, Robert, Blake's *Evening* in Alcaics, 325.
Epistle to a Socialist in London, 323.
Eros and Psyche, 157.
Milton's Prosody, 89, 92–3.
'My eyes for beauty pine', 170.
Now in Wintry Delights, 325.
Sonnets, 217.
Triolet, 293.
Brome, Alexander, *Leveller's Rant, The*, 260–1.
Brooke, Rupert, Sonnets, 217.
Browne, Sir Thomas, *Urne-Burial*, 3.
Browne, William, 29.
Britannia's Pastorals, 49, 166.
Browning, Elizabeth, Sonnets, 211–2.
Browning, Robert, *Agamemnon of Aeschylus, The*, 142.
Before, 251.
Christmas Eve and Easter Day, 41–2.
Cristina, 252.
Fra Lippo Lippi, 140.
Guardian Angel, The, 158.
Home Thoughts from the Sea, 250.
How we brought the good News, 262–3.
In a Year, 253.
Love among the Ruins, 251.
Men and Women, 251.
Misconceptions, 270.
One Word More, 251.
Paracelsus, 140.
Parleyings with Certain People, 58.
Pisgah-Sights, 270.
Ring and the Book, The, 141–2.
Saul, 266–7.
Serenade at the Villa, A, 252.
Soliloquy of a Spanish Cloister, 252.
Toccata of Galuppi's, A, 250–1, 279–80.
Woman's Last Word, A, 252.
Burns, Robert, 'Ae Fond Kiss', 241.
Cottar's Saturday Night, The, 162–3.
Duncan Gray, 241.
Strathallan's Lament, 240–1.
Tam o' Shanter, 35.
To a Mouse, 175.
Burns stanza, 174–5.

Byron, George Noel Gordon, Lord, *Cain*, 133.
Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, 164.
Don Juan, 167–8.
Dream, The, 133.
English Bards and Scotch Reviewers, 57.

Campion, Thomas, 'Long have mine eyes gaz'd with delight', 178.
Observations in the Art of English Poesie, 236, 305–6.
'Rose-cheekt Laura come', 236.
'Where are all thy beauties now', 184.
Carew, Thomas, *Good Counsel to a Young Maid*, 238.
To the New Year, 238.
Casey, John K., *Maire, My Girl*, 269.
Centlivre, Mrs., *Perjur'd Husband, The*, 116.
Chamberlayne, William, *Pharonnida*, 50.
Chant Royal, 289.
Chapman, George, tr., *Iliad*, 171.
Chatterton, Thomas, *Battle of Hastings, The*, 162.
Excellent Ballad of Charity, An, 156.
Chaucer, Geoffrey, Five-Foot Couplets in, 45–6.
Four-Foot Couplets in, 26–7.
French Forms in, 286.
Merciles Beauté, 291.
Monk's Tale, The, 153.
Tale of Sir Thopas, The, 173.
Troilus and Cressida, 152.
Choriambic movement, 32.
Choriambics, 321.
Choriambus, 12.
Clough, Arthur Hugh, *Amours de Voyage*, 316, 318–9.
Bothie, The, 315–6.
ἐπὶ Λάτμῳ, 254–5.
Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, *Aeolian Harp, The*, 129.
Ancient Mariner, The, 4–5, 8, 10, 11.
Burke, 206.
Catullan Hendecasyllabics, 311.
Christabel, 35–8.
Hymn to the Earth, 310.
Mahomet, 311.
Ode, irregular, in, 226.
Piccolomini, The, 130.
Religious Musings, 129.
Remorse, 130.
Sonnets on Eminent Characters, 206.
To the Honourable Mr. Erskine, 206.
To the River Otter, 206.
Collins, William, Odes, Pindaric, 221.
Ode 1746, 4.
Ode to Evening, 224.
Passions, The, 226.
Congreve, William, *Mourning Bride, The*, 114–5.
Pindarique Ode, A, 219–20.
Constable, Henry, *Diana*, 195.
Cotterill, H. B., tr., *Odyssey*, 325–6.
Couplets, 6.
Alexandrine, 169.
four-foot, 24–44
Couplets, four-foot, 45–60.
four-foot, stanza forms from, 176–8.
fourteener, 170–1.
fourteener, stanza form from, 171.
heptasyllabic, 28–30, 39.
Cowley, Abraham, Odes, 225.
Cowper, William, 54.
Lines written under the Influence of Delirium, 308.
Loss of the Royal George, The, 170.
'Mary, I want a lyre', 205.
Poplar, Field, The, 262.
Retirement, 54.
Task, The, 111–2.
To Mary, 185.
Yardley Oak, 112.
Crabbe, George, *Borough, The*, 55.
Parish Register, The, 55.
Crashaw, Richard, *Out of the Italian, A Song*, 237.
To his (supposed) Mistress, 184.
Croxall, Samuel, *An Original Canto of Spenser*, 160–1.
Cumberland, Richard, *Carmelite, The*, 126–7.
Cursor Mundi, 26.

Dactyllics, Southey's, 309.
Darley, George, *Moon and Sea*, 210.
D'Avenant, Sir William, *Albovine*, 83.
Davison's *Poetical Rhapsody*, 151, 230.
Dekker, Thomas, 'Art thou poor, yet hast thou', 235.
De la Mare, Walter, *Listeners, The*, 283–4.
Dobson, Austin, *Clean Hands*, 289–90.
To George H. Boughton, 290.
Dodsley, Robert, *Cleone*, 125.
Donne, John, *Divine Poems*, 200.
'Go and catch a falling star', 237.
Satyre III, 50.
Doughty, Charles Montague, *Adam Cast Forth*, 148.
Drayton, Michael, 48.
Barons' Wars, The, 166.
Endimion and Phoebe, 49.
England's Heroical Epistles, 49.
Heart, The, 184.
Idea's Mirror, 194–5.
Legend of Piers Gaveston, 168.
Legend of Robert Duke of Normandy, 155.
Nimphidia, 174.
Odes in, 222.
Shepherd's Serena, The, 237.
Drinkwater, John, *Storm, The*, 146.
Dryden, John, *Absalom and Achitophel*, 51
All for Love, 117–8.
Annus Mirabilis, 181–2.
Eleanora, 52.
Hind and the Panther, The, 51–2.
Marriage a-la-Mode, 116–7.
Odes, 225–6.
Dyer, John, *Fleece, The*, 109.
Grongar Hill, 33.

Elegiacs, 298, 301, 303, 317–8, 320.
Elisions, 14–15.
in Milton, 89–91.
Elliott, Ebenezer, *Battle Song*, 181.
To Thomas Lister, 319.

Emphasis, 2, 3.
England's Helicon, 176, 180, 230–3, 260.

Fairfax, Edward, 48
Godfrey of Bulloigne, 165–6.
Feet, 6, 9–12.
amphibrach, 13, 17–8.
anapaest, 9, 16–7.
antibacchius, 18.
bacchius, 18.
choriambus, 12.
cretic, 19.
dactyl, 9, 17.
iambus, 9.
ionic a majore, 19.
ionic a minore, 12.
paeons, 18, n. 8.
pyrrhic, 11.
spondee, 11.
tribrach, 17.
trisyllabic, 16.
trochee, 9.
Fenton, Elijah, *Mariamne*, 123.
Fitzgerald, Edward, *Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyam, The*, 183.
Fleming, Ferdinand, *Integer Vitae*, music for, 310.
Fletcher, Giles, *Christ's Victory*, 159–60.
Fletcher, John, 29.
Bonduca, 81–82.
Faithful Shepherdess, The, 82.
'Tell me, dearest, what is Love', 234.
Fletcher, Phineas, *Purple Island, The*, 159–60.
Ford, John, *Broken Heart, The*, 84.
Fraunce, Abraham, *Countess of Pembroke's Emanuel, The*, 304–5.

Galliambics, 312–3, 323.
Gay, John, *Beggar's Opera, The*, 240.
Genesis and Exodus, 25, 36.
Gifford, Humphrey, *Posie of Gilloflowers, A*, 260.
Glide, 14–15.
Goldsmith, Oliver, *Deserted Village, The*, 54.
Gosse, Edmund, *After Anyte of Tegea*, 290.
'In fair Provence', 293.
Granville, George, Lord Lansdowne, *To Mira*, 239.
Gray, Thomas, *Bard, The*, 220.
Elegy in a Country Churchyard, 182.
Odes, 222.
Progress of Poesy, The, 220–1.
Gray's Elegy stanza form, 181–3.
Great Adventurer, The, 276.
Green, Matthew, *Spleen, The*, 35.
Griffin, Gerald, *Aileen Aroon*, 272–3.

Hardy, Thomas, *Dynasts, The*, 144–5.
Harvey, Christopher, *Epiphany, The*, 179.
Harvey, Gabriel, *Three Proper Wittie and Familiar Letters*, 297.
Havelock the Dane, 25–6.
Helen of Kirconnell, 185.
Hendecasyllabics, 301, 311, 321.
Henley, William Ernest, *Beside the Summer Sea*, 291.
In Hospital, 256–7.
Rhymes and Rhythms, 172.
Henryson, Robert, *Testament of Cresseid, The*, 153.
Herbert, George, *Discipline*, 238–9.
Herrick, Robert, 'Gather ye Rosebuds', 172.
His Grange or Private Wealth, 181.
His Recantation, 175.
Ode on the Death of Endimion Porter's Brother, 222.
Ring presented to Julia, A, 175.
To his Mistress, 270.
Upon Julia's Clothes, 184.
'Welcome maids of Honour', 180.
Hexameters, 296–8, 299–300, 303, 304–5, 310, 311–2, 314–7, 318, 319, 322, 325–6.
Hodgson, Ralph, *Stupidity Street*, 274.
Home, John, *Douglas*, 125–6.
Hood, Thomas, *Bridge of Sighs, The*, 269.
Howard, Henry (Earl of Surrey), tr., *Aeneid, Books II, IV*, 61, 62–3.
Sonnets by, 189–90.
Howe, Julia Ward, *Battle Hymn of the Republic*, 280.
Hughes, John, *Siege of Damascus, The*, 123.
Hunting of the Cheviot, The, 171.

Iambic Trimeters, 299.
In Memoriam stanza-form, 178–80.

James I, of Scotland, *Kingis Quair, The*, 153.
'Jesu, thou art our saviour', 150.
Jonson, Benjamin, *An Elegie*, 178.
Catiline, 79.
'Queen and Huntress chaste and fair', 233.
Sad Shepherd, The, 80.
To the Immortall memory of Sir Lucius Cary and Sir H. Morison, 219.

Kalevala, 255, 257.
trans. Crawford, J. M., 257.
trans. Kirby, W. F., 257.
Keats, John, *Endymion*, 55–6.
Eve of St. Agnes, The, 164.
Eve of St. Mark, The, 40.
Fall of Hyperion, The, 137.
Hyperion, 136, 137.
Isabella, 167.
La Belle Dame sans Merci, 172.
Lamia, 56–7.
Lines on the Mermaid Tavern, 40.
Odes, 222–3, 246.
Sonnets, 208–10.
Kingsley, Charles, *Andromeda*, 316–7.
Elegiacs, 317–8.

Lamb, Charles, *Old Familiar Faces, The*, 282–3, 310.
Langland, William, *Piers Plowman*, 229.
Lansdowne, Lord. See Granville, George.
Lee, Nathaniel, *Rival Queens, The*, 119.
'Lenten is come with Love to toun', 149.
Lindsay, Sir David, *Squire Meldrum*, 28.
Lodge, Thomas, *Montanus Praise of his faire Phoebe*, 233.
'Muses help me', 231.
Phillis, 195.

Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth, *Belfry of Bruges, The*, 255.
Courtship of Miles Standish, The, 314.
Evangeline, 313–4.
Golden Legend, The, 272.
Hiawatha, 255–6.
Nuremberg, 255.

Marlowe, Christopher, 45.
Dr. Faustus, 65–6.
Edward II, 66.
Passionate Shepherd to his Love, The, 176.
Tamburlaine the Great, 64–6.
Martyn, Benjamin, *Timoleon*, 124.
Marvell, Andrew, four-foot couplets in, 31–3.
Horatian Ode, 224.
'Mary is a lady bright', 150.
Masefield, John, *Daffodil Fields, The*, 156–7.
Dauber, 156, 157.
Twilight, 271.
Wanderer, The, 182.
Widow in Bye Street, The, 156.
Mason, William, *To a Gravel-Walk*, 204.
Meredith, George, *Cassandra*, 178.
Iliad, 322.
Love in a Valley, 280–1.
Modern Love, 215–6.
Phaethon, 323.
Sonnets, 216.
'The daisy now is out upon the green', 180.
Metre, 6–8.
Milne, A. A., *Bad Sir Brian Botany*, 285.
Milton, John, *Comus*, 85–9.
four-foot couplets in, 30.
Hymn on the Morning of Christ's Nativity, 222.
Ode on the Death of a Fair Infant, 155–6.
Paradise Lost, 89–101.
Paradise Regained, 101–3.
Passion, The, 155.
Samson Agonistes, 103–5.
Sonnets, 201–3.
Mirror for Magistrates, 154.
Modulations, 6, 10–13, 16–19.
More, Mrs. Hannah, *Percy*, 126.
Morris, William, *Earthly Paradise, The*, 43–4, 59, 156.
King Arthur's Tomb, 182.
Praise of My Lady, 185.
Sigurd the Volsung, 264–5.
Murray, Gilbert, 221.
trans. *Hippolytus*, 282.

Norton, Thomas, 61.
Gorboduc, 63.

Ode-form, 218–28.
O'Shaughnessy, Arthur, 'We are the Music Makers', 277–8.
Ottava Rima and variants, 165–8.
Otway, Thomas, *Venice Preserved*, 119–21.
Owle and the Nightingale, The, 24–5.

Paradise of Dainty Devices, 287.
Parnell, Thomas, *Hymn to Contentment, A*, 33, 34.
Pattern, 5.
Pause, 9, 13–4.
Peacock, Thomas Love, 'I dug beneath the Cypress shade', 176.
Peele, George, *Arraignment of Paris, The*, 63–4.
Philips, Ambrose, *Ode to Miss Carteret*, 34.
Philips, John, *Blenheim*, 106.
Cyder, 106.
Phoenix Nest, The, 175, 182, 230.
Pitch, 2, 3.
Pope, Alexander, *Rape of the Lock, The*, 52.
Epistle to Arbuthnot, 54.
Essay on Man, An, 53.
Poulter's Measure, 170.
Prior, Matthew, *A Better Answer*, 261.
Puttenham, George, *Arte of English Poesie, The*, 260.

Quantity, 2, 294–306, 313, 318, 323–5.

Ramayana, 258.
Rhyme, 2, 19–23.
imperfect, 20–22.
internal, 23.
Rhythm, 2–8.
Rime couée, 173.
Rime riche, 20.
Rime royal and variants, 152–9.
Rondeau, 286–90.
Rondeau redoublé, 292.
Rondel, 290.
Roscommon, Earl of, trans. *Ars Poetica*, 105.
Rossetti, Christina G., 'Love to be love must walk thy way', 180.
Sonnets, 213–4.
'Tune me o Lord into one harmony', 181.
Rossetti, Dante Gabriel, *Blessed Damozel, The*, 173.
Dante at Verona, 169.
House of Life, The, 212–3.
My Sister's Sleep, 178.
Rose Mary, 177.
Troy Town, 254.
Roundel, 291–2.
Rowe, Nicholas, *Jane Shore*, 121–2.
Rubáiyát stanza, 183.
Russell, Thomas, 'On this lone Isle', 204.
To Boccaccio, 204–5.
To Valclusa, 204.

Sackville, Thomas, Earl of Dorset, 61.
Gorboduc, 63.
Sapphics, 302, 304, 306–9, 320–1.
Scott, Sir Walter, *Lady of the Lake, The*, 41, 267.
Pibroch of Donuil Dhu, 269, 273.
Young Lochinvar, 262.
Sestina, 293.
Sestina, double, 293.
Shakespeare, William,
Alexandrines in, 77–8.
Antony and Cleopatra, 69–71, 73, 76.
As You Like It, 77.

Shakespeare, William, 'Come away, come away, Death', 267–8.
Heptasyllabic couplets in, 28–9.
Julius Caesar, 75, 78.
King Lear, 74, 75, 77, 78.
Macbeth, 69, 75, 76, 77.
Modulations in, 73–9.
Othello, 68, 74.
Rape of Lucrece, The, 155.
Romeo and Juliet, 67.
Songs in, 233–4.
Sonnets, 196–8.
Tempest, The, 71–2, 74, 75, 76, 77.
Three-foot line in, 78.
Trochaic verse in, 233–4.
Winter's Tale, The, 72.
Shelley, Percy Bysshe, *Adonais*, 163–4.
Alastor, 135.
Cenci, The, 135.
Hellas, 135.
Lines written among the Euganean Hills, 39, 246.
Ode to the West Wind, 183–4.
Prometheus Unbound, 134, 135, 246.
Revolt of Islam, The, 163.
To a Skylark, 246–7.
Witch of Atlas, The, 167.
Shenstone, William, *Scholar's Relapse, The*, 261.
Schoolmistress, The, 161.
Shirley, James, *Maid's Revenge, The*, 83–4.
'Woodmen shepherds, come away', 235.
Sidney, Sir Philip, *Another of Astrophel to his Stella*, 231.
Arcadia, poems in, 193, 300–302.
Astrophel and Stella, 191–3.
Epitaph upon . . . Sir Philip Sidney, 182.
Sir Gawayne and the Greene Knight, 151.
Sir Tristrem, 150.
Skelton, John, *Colin Clout*, 259.
Smart, Christopher, *Song to David, A*, 173.
Smith, Alexander, *Lady Barbara*, 165.
Songes and Sonettes, 20, 154, 168–70, 176–8, 187–90.
Southerne, Thomas, *Oroonoko*, 121.
Southey, Robert, *Soldier's Wife, The*, 309.
Vision of Judgement, The, 311–2.
Widow, The, 308.
Spenser, Edmund, *Amoretti*, 193–4.
classical elegiacs, 298–9.
Epithalamion, 224–5.
Faerie Queene, The, 159, 170, 176.
Hymn of Heavenly Love, An, 154.
Mother Hubbard's Tale, 47, 49.
Shepheardes Calender, The, 47–8.
Spenserian stanza form, and variants, 159–65.
Stanyhurst, Richard, tr., *Aeneid*, 299.
Stanza, 6.
Stanza forms, see ababcc; Alexandrine; Ballad; Burns stanza; Couplet, fourteener; Couplet, four-foot; Gray's Elegy stanza; Ode form; Ottava Rima: Poulter's measure; Rime Royal; Rubáiyát stanza; Spenserian stanza: Terza Rima; Triplets; Triplets with refrain.
Stanza forms, Alliterative, 151.
Mediaeval, 149–151.
Mixed lines, 180–1.
Stevenson, Robert Louis, *Child's Garden of Verses, A*, 176.
Songs of Travel, 271.
Stress, 3.
Suckling, Sir John 'Out upon it, I have lov'd', 235.
'Why so pale and wan, fond lover', 235.
Surrey, Earl of. See Howard, Henry.
Swift, Jonathan, *On the Death of Dr. Swift*, 35.
Swinburne, Algernon Charles, *Atalanta in Calydon*, 263–4, 274–5.
Aperotos Eros, 254.
Armada, The, 271–2.
Athens, 253, 279.
Ballad of Dreamland, A, 288–9.
By the North Sea, 253.
Child's Future, A, 271.
Choriambics, 321.
Complaint of Lisa, The, 293.
Dark Month, A, 263.
Death of Théophile Gautier, 183.
Dedication to Christina Rossetti, 292.
Erectheus, 253, 270, 281.
Evening on the Broads, 319–20.
Grace Darling, 253–4.
Grand Chorus of Birds, 322.
Hendecasyllabics, 321.
Hymn to Proserpine, 264.
Inferiae, 185.
Laus Veneris, 183.
March, An Ode, 266.
Mary Stuart, 143–4.
Sapphics, 320–1.
Sonnets, 214–5.
Tristram of Lyonnesse, 59–60.

Tennyson, Alfred, Lord, 178.
Alcaics, 313.
Boadicea, 312–3.
Captain, The, 247.
Coming of Arthur, The, 138.
Guinevere, 138.
Holy Grail, The, 139, 140.
In Memoriam, 179.
Lady of Shalott, The, 247.
Locksley Hall, 247–9, 279.
Lord of Burleigh, The, 247.
Lotos-Eaters, The, 164–5, 249.
Lucretius, 138.
Maud, 170.
On Translations of Homer, 313.
Passing of Arthur, The, 139.
Pelleas and Ettarre, 139.
Revenge, The, 282.
Sonnets, 211.
Ulysses, 138, 139.
Vision of Sin, A, 57–8.
Terza Rima, 22, 183–4.
Thompson, Francis, *Ode to the Setting Sun*, 227.
To a Snowflake, 275.
Thomson, James (1700–1748), *Castle of Indolence, The*, 161.
Seasons, The, 106–8.
Sophonisba, 124–5.

Thomson, James (B. V.), *City of Dreadful Night, The*, 157–8.
To our Ladies of Death, 157.
Tofte, Robert, *Laura*, 195.
Toplady, Augustus Montagu, 'Rock of Ages cleft for me', 239.
Tottel's Miscellany. See *Songes and Sonettes*.
Triolet, 293.
Triplets, 184.
Triplets with refrain, 185.
Turner, Charles Tennyson, *Letty's Globe*, 211.

'Venus faire did ride', 232.
Verse, 1.
Verse, anapaestic, 259–68.
Verse, blank, 13.
Verse, classical, 294–326. See also Alcaics; Anapaestic Heptameter; *Anacrions kinde of verses*; Asclepiads; Choriambics; Dactyllics; Elegiacs; Galliambics; Hexameter; Hendecasyllabics; Sapphics.
Verse, dactyllic, 269–72.
Verse, paeonic, 279–85.
Verse-rhythm, 4–6.
Verse, trisyllabic, 259–78.
mixed and doubtful trisyllabic, 272–8.
Verse, trochaic, 229–58.
Villanelle, 292–3.

Waller, Edmund, 50–1.
Watts, Isaac, *Cradle Hymn*, 239.
Day of Judgement, The, 306–7.
Way, A. S., 221.
Webbe, William, *Discourse of English Poetrie, A*, 303.
Webster, John, 45.
Duchess of Malfi, The, 80–1.
Wesley, Charles, 'Jesu lover of my soul', 239.
White, James Blanco, 'Mysterious Night!' 210–1.
Wilde, Oscar, *Burden of Itys, The*, 168–9.
Sphinx, The, 179–80.
Theocritus, 292–3.
Winchilsea, Lady, *The Tree*, 34.
To a Nightingale, 34.
Wither, George, 29.
Wooton, John, *Damaetas Iigge*, 233.
Wordsworth, William, 'A Slumber did my spirit seal', 171.
Blank verse, 130–2.
Borderers, The, 130–1.
Ecclesiastical Sonnets, 207.
Female Vagrant, The, 163.
Green Linnet, The, 174.
Horn of Egremont Castle, The, 245.
King's College Chapel, 207.
Odes, 226.
On the Extinction of the Venetian Republic, 207.
Prelude, The, 131–2.
Ruth, 174.
Song for the Spinning Wheel, 245–6.
Sonnets, 206–8.
'Three Years she grew', 174.
To a Daisy, 174.
To the Small Celandine, 245.
Wotton, Sir Henry, *On his Mistress the Queen of Bohemia*, 177.
Poem written in his youth, A, 181.
Wyatt, Sir Thomas, 'All you that Friendship do profess', 177.
'My Lute awake', 177–8.
Rondeaux, 287.
Sonnets, 186–9.

Yeats, William Butler, *Countess Cathleen, The*, 147.
Land of Heart's Desire, The, 148.
Wanderings of Oisin, The, 265–6.
Young, Edward, *Night Thoughts*, 108–9.

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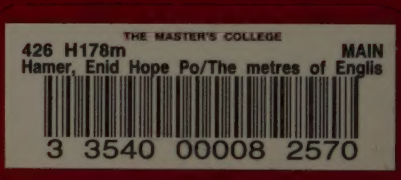
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